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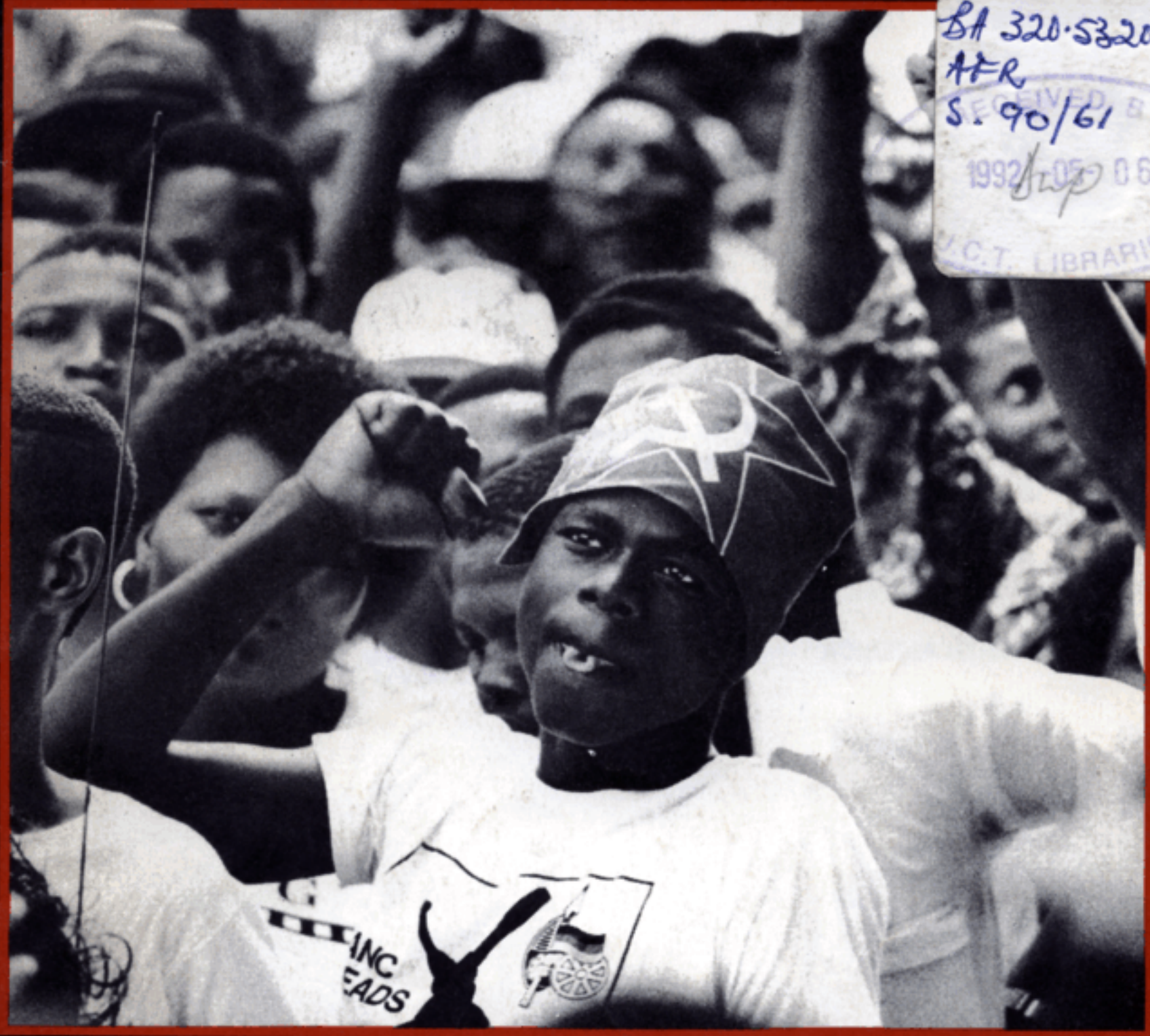

VIVA SOCIALISM!

Learning From The Crisis

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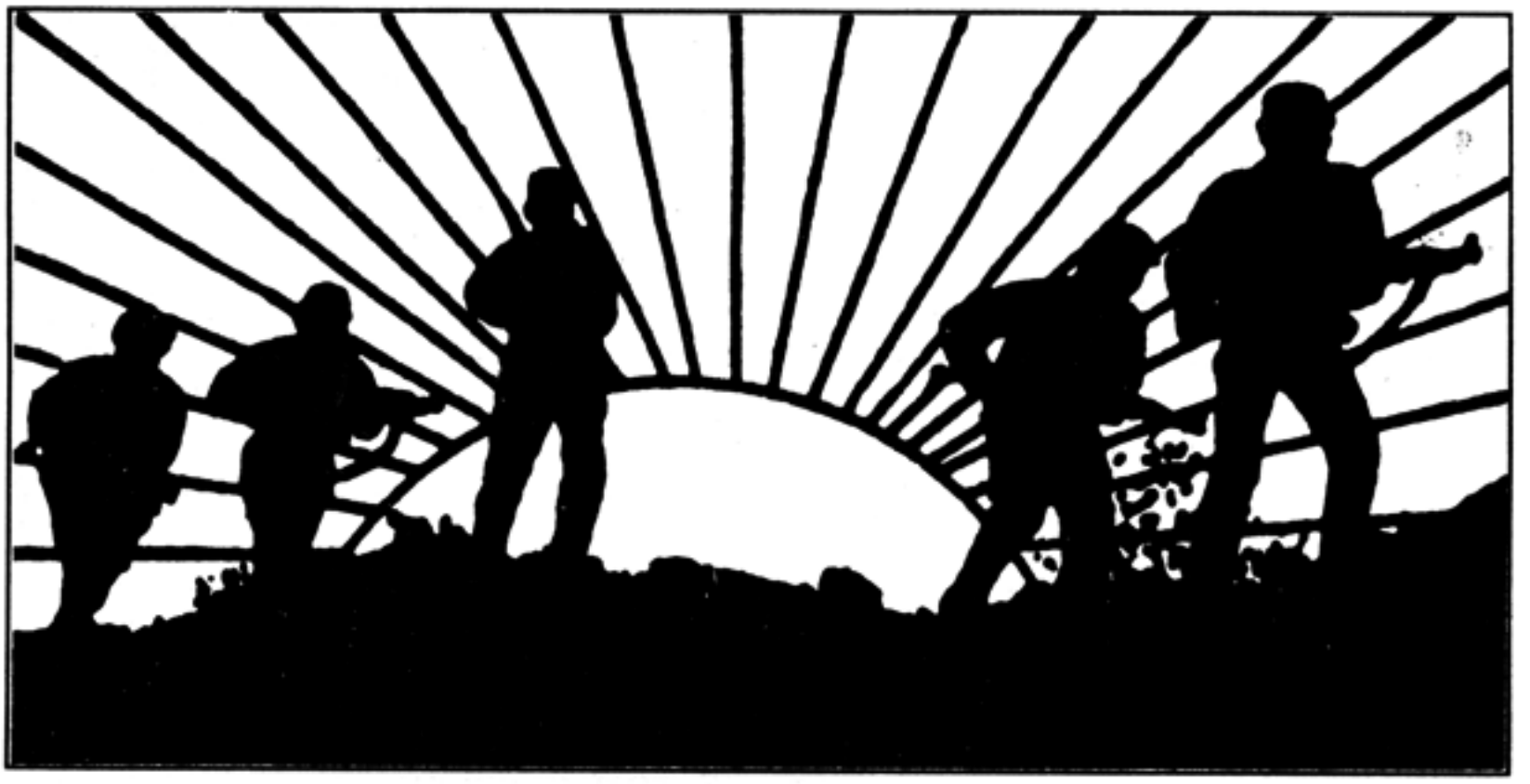


Build the Patriotic Front for a Constituent Assembly

There is now a relatively new political reality at work in our country. The regime is, for the first time, unambivalently contesting the political ground with us, outside of its own traditional white constituency. It is working to win adherence among the oppressed, and to find new friends among the liberal white constituency as well.

We need to understand this very clearly, and we need to relate this reality to the present negotiating process.

Our ANC-led liberation alliance is talking to the regime, not because we accept its legitimacy, but because it has *de facto* power.

On the other side, as a result of our power (internal and external), the regime has concluded that it cannot continue to rule in the old way. It has been forced to seek a transformation through a dialogue in which it accepts the ANC as the main actor on the other side. But it does this, equally, as a recognition of the ANC's power, and not as an acceptance of its legitimacy.

The regime is seeking a deal which will ensure a minimum of interference with the accumulated economic privileges of whites. Thus, its search for a negotiated solution comes with two additional, interconnected objectives. Firstly, it attempts at every moment to weaken the ANC by narrowing its support base among the people. And, secondly, it is seeking to extend its own support base among blacks.

The National Party has opened its ranks to all. It is mooting political alliances with Inkatha and other bantustan parties. There have been concerted attempts to win acceptance by coloured and Indian upper strata, with the NP presenting itself as the lesser of two evils. De Klerk has also quite effectively cut the ground from under the feet of the liberal white opposition, by co-opting many

of their policies.

De Klerk has spelt out his ambitions very clearly during the recent Maitland all-white, by-election:

"There is a wealth of support, across the colour lines, for that which the National Party stands for. We are busy consolidating that support and bringing together people who believe in the same values as we do. This has the power to grow to the basis of the strongest political stream in our country." (*Citizen*, 5.3.91)

We need to draw a very clear lesson from this. The regime might be the negotiating partner of our ANC-led alliance. But it remains our most serious political enemy. We must never forget that we are contesting the political ground with them - in other words, working for their political defeat.

In the same speech, De Klerk provided us with another sobering reminder when he boasted to the election meeting:

"The NP has the power to prevent the acceptance of a constitution which goes against the values the party stands for."

Seldom has he put it so clearly. We have been warned. We cannot judge De Klerk solely by what he tells us across the table. We must pay more attention to what he says when he speaks to his tribe.

Make no mistake, the regime has a highly sophisticated strategy over a wide panorama. De Klerk has already shown considerable talent in using negotiations as an effective terrain of struggle.

So what is our answer? Apart from mass mobilisation and all-round pressure in support of our objectives, we must match De Klerk's broad front strategy with our own strategy. We must maximise the unity and efforts of all those organised sectors who support the basic objective of an immediate transfer of power to the majority.

In other words, we must urgently work towards the building of a powerful Patriotic Front.

How do we go about this task? In particular, what will be the common denominator which will bring democratic forces together?

• We must drop any take-it-or-leave-it approach when elaborating the basis of the front. The ANC has already started discussions with PAC, AZAPO, and others.

• But there also has to be a bottom line. The key question facing South Africa at the moment in relation to the negotiating process is surely : who is to decide on the future permanent constitutional framework for a post-apartheid South Africa? Will it be the present government, reinforced by a co-opted group among the oppressed, or assisted by some kind of essentially advisory structure? Or will it be an assembly of the people, elected on the basis of one person, one vote in a fair election?

It follows that the bottom line for the launch of the Patriotic Front is support for a Constituent Assembly. This objective has the merit of being both correct and simple to grasp.

We should, of course, have our own proposals about the interim mechanism for ensuring a real popular mandate. We are of the view that elections for a Constituent Assembly can only be fair if these are administered by an Interim Government, with effective control over state organs and which can ensure fair media access to all parties.

But we should not make the detailed provisions of such an interim mechanism a precondition for participating in the Patriotic Front. This question should be open for discussion at the conference which launches the Front.

In speaking of a "launch" we are also suggesting that the Patriotic Front must not be seen as just a single conference, but as

the beginning of the creation of a democratic front in the struggle for a Constituent Assembly. Perhaps a liaison committee for the pursuit of the campaign for a Constituent Assembly should be decided upon at the conference.

Who should be invited to such a conference? It is our view that all representatives of significant, organised groupings, irrespective of their ideological positions (whether they are patriotic bantustan leaders or representatives of business) who support the idea of a Constituent Assembly, should be invited. ★

From SACP to No-Name Brand?

Oscar Dhlomo of the Institute for Multiparty Democracy, Harry Schwarz, Pretoria's ambassador designate to Washington, and a number of others have recently been offering the SACP unsolicited (but what is probably well intended) advice. They are asking us to change our name.

"Instead of dressing communism in clothes borrowed from democracy, I wish Mr Slovo could come out one of these days and say that the SACP is now changing its name to something like the Labour Party or the Social Democratic Party", writes Dhlomo ("Change the Red face of the SACP", *The Star*, 9.2.91).

Well, the fact of the matter is that we **are** a Communist Party. Not a Labour Party or a Social Democratic Party.

There are two issues at play in Dhlomo's remarks, and we must be careful not to confuse them.

On the one hand, there have indeed been stagnant, statist systems in which Communist Parties have been in power, not to mention many brutal crimes that have been committed in the name of "communism". These are realities that have deviated from the most basic ideals and objectives of communism. Communists themselves, as in the Soviet Union in the time of the purges of the 1930s, have been among the major victims of these deviations.

Here in South Africa, by retaining our name Communist, and not indulging in some cosmetic face-lift, we are accepting in full responsibility the task of confronting the reality of the crimes committed in the name of the cause for which we stand. We are not running away from this responsibility. We believe that we have a particular role to play, precisely **as a Communist Party**, in taking on this task.

But this is only one side of the matter. From the very beginnings of the international communist movement, one hundred and forty years ago, there has been an enormous anti-communist propaganda industry. It has been an industry that has churned out some of the most lurid and hysterical distortions about communism.

The intended victims of this propaganda industry have, of course, been communists and the movement and ideals we espouse. But there have also been millions of unwitting non-communists who have become the victims of their own prejudices.

With the public reappearance of our party after 40 years in the underground, some of the least bigotted of our political opponents (Dhlomo and Schwarz among them) can't help noticing that it is difficult to reconcile their received prejudices with the concrete reality of the SACP.

If only we would change our name, then their prejudices would not need re-examining!

"If the SACP is sincerely no longer espousing the communism that people dread, then it should not allow the label of communism to hang like an albatross around its neck and thereby drive away potential supporters", writes Dhlomo.

Just who are "the people" in this case? Our Party would not have been doing its job if the cause it espoused was not dreaded by those who have grown idly fat and rich through the whole-scale exploitation of the majority. May **these** people continue to dread communism!

But our support for multi-partyism, for political tolerance, for a Bill of Rights, for a mixed economy in the transitional period - none of these are a departure from our ideals. (In fact, the basic Marxist definition of socialism is precisely that it is a mixed economy in transition to full communism).

It is not the South African Communist Party that is the newcomer to democracy in our country. In the late 1920s our party called for majority rule, one person one vote. This was decades before the ANC and several more decades before any other formation in our country made similar demands.

As for non-racialism which the NP has suddenly discovered, for some four decades, from its inception in 1921, our Party was the only non-racial political organisation in our country.

Should the SACP change its name?

Perhaps our well-intentioned advisers, Dhlomo, Schwarz and others, should consider changing their prejudices instead. ★

The 'AC' returns home

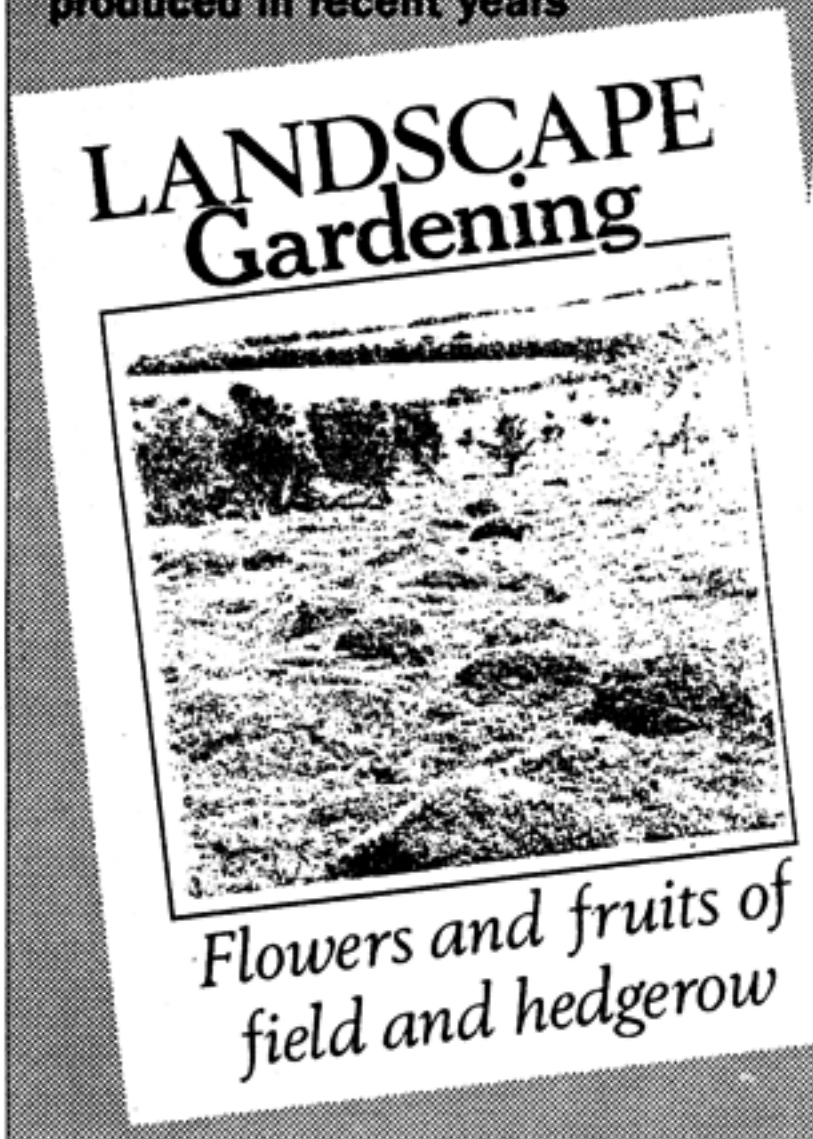
This first quarter 1991 issue of *The African Communist* marks the full return home of the SACP's theoretical organ. It is now, once more, being edited, printed and published on home ground.

Of course, *The African Communist* has been circulating, clandestinely, in our country since its very first appearance in October 1959. After a few perilous years in the underground, the journal's editorial board was reconstituted in exile in London.

But the "AC", as it has come to be familiarly known to thousands of South African militants, continued to be smuggled into our country. Sometimes it came in minituarised form. It also came in with false covers - *The Good Food Guide. Wholemeal - Breads and Biscuits*, reads the clandestine cover for the Third Quarter 1988 issue; *Landscape Gardening. Flowers and fruits of field and hedgerow* is the innocent cover for the Second Quarter 1989 issue. Copies getting into our country were quicky reproduced and circulated, hand to hand, becoming dog-eared photocopies. The "AC" even found its way into apartheid's jails, where political prisoners, like mediaeval scribes, hand-copied articles for further distribution.

The African Communist's readership and influence has also been international. In its

Don't judge a book by its cover — underground editions of The African Communist, produced in recent years



original conception, *The African Communist*, as its name suggested, had a continental intention. The editorial note, entitled "This Magazine" in the very first issue says:

"This magazine ... has been started by a group of Marxist-Leninists in Africa, to defend and spread the inspiring and liberating ideas of Communism to our great Continent, and to apply the brilliant scientific method of Marxism to the solution of its problems.

"It is being produced in conditions of great difficulty and danger. Nevertheless we mean to go on publishing it, because we know that Africa needs Communist thought, as dry and thirsty soil needs rain.

"To you, the reader, we say, comrade and fellow-worker, wherever you may be, read and study this magazine. Pass it on to your fellow-workers and form study groups to discuss it. These groups may become foundation stones of great and important Communist Parties in many lands that will bring salvation to your country."

The full story of the role and influence of *The African Communist* in Africa over three decades remains to be written. The period of the journal's first appearance was one of rapid decolonisation in Africa. The burning question of the time was: Which Way

Africa? Should newly independent African countries pursue a capitalist or socialist path of development? It was into this debate that the journal intervened consciously and actively.

For instance, in the second issue, published in April 1960, "Toussaint" contributed an article ("How Foreign is Communism?") arguing for the relevance of Marxism-Leninism to our continent.

It is a measure of the continuity, but also of the development and changes both in the world and in our journal, that the very same "Toussaint" has contributed an article to the present issue.

"Toussaint's" present article, like several of the other contributors, reflects on the lessons of Eastern Europe for the impending changes within South Africa itself. In a sense, this shift represents the shift in focus that *The African Communist*, going into the 1990s, must necessarily make.

It is a shift both to the broader world situation, not least the challenge posed by the present crisis in much of existing socialism, AND to a more detailed consideration of the transition period here in our own country.

But we assure our readers, *The African Communist* will remain unabashedly Communist.

In its more than thirty years of existence, from underground to exile, *The African Communist* has never once failed to appear on a quarterly basis. Much of the credit for this outstanding achievement must go to our comrade, Brian Bunting, who was editor of the journal from the mid-1960s through until the final quarter issue of last year. Brian was assisted throughout by his wife, comrade Sonia Bunting, who handled the administrative and distribution side.

The Buntings are due to return to South Africa soon, and although they are both looking forward to a well-earned retirement, we are sure that our journal will continue to benefit from their vast experience. ★

Socialist aspirations and socialist realities

Joe Slovo

This is an edited version of two interventions made by Joe Slovo while attending an international socialist seminar organised by Monthly Review in New York, October 1990

The topic for this session - "Socialist realities and socialist aspirations" implies that there is a gap between the two. Before reflecting on this gap, let me make a confession in response to some pessimistic remarks made in the course of these proceedings. I confess that I remain an unrehabilitated utopian. I believe (not in the religious sense, although I use religious symbolism) that the human soul is quite capable of achieving a form of society in which one person does not live off the labour of another. And that, in one simple sentence, is socialism, the lodestar of all radicals, both before and after Marx, which I am convinced will ultimately be reached.

Of course to reach it will require more than theoretical discourses; the main vehicle will be organisation and struggle by the wretched of this earth. And we should remember that the wretched of this earth constitute 90%, if not more, of humanity who live either in capitalist or capitalist orientated socio-economic formations. For them, if socialism is not the answer, there is no answer at all. And that's not the way humanity works; in the end it moves inexorably towards an answer.

The gap between socialist realities and socialist aspirations has been, and continues to be sufficiently documented. The primary questions which remain (and which are very much interrelated) are, what created the gap and is it possible to bridge it? In other words was the socialist promise false from the start or was it merely unfulfilled?

I believe the promise was not false from the start. It was unfulfilled. And it should be emphasised that even within the deformed socialist societies there were achievements which signalled the great potential of socialism. Scores of millions were inspired and dedicated in their attempts to build socialism on the ground. There were heroic moments when they fought tenaciously to defend what they considered to be the realism of some of its achievements and of its promise. They would not have done so if their only experience of it had been total and unmitigated failure. But, on balance, a failure it was. And, demonstrably, it has either collapsed or faces grave crises. Why this has come about is the question we will undoubtedly debate for decades to come.

We should dismiss the external conspiracy theory as the sole explanation. External intervention undoubtedly helped the process of collapse along, but it was not the main culprit. At the end of the day we are left with one of two answers. If what hap-

pened had to happen because of an irreparable fault in the essence of Marxist thought and its socialist objectives then that's it; for the moment it may be "the end of history". If however, the essence of Marxism with its aspiration towards a socialist order remains valid (which, I suspect, most of us here believe to be so) then to enable us to return to history, we need to uncover what it is that went wrong.

In general, the fundamental failure is the divide between socialism and democracy both within the Party and within society, leading to a gross form of socialist alienation of the producer from all levels of the socio-economic formation. How did this come about? The debate has only just begun. My own experience in this debate is that almost before the ink is dry nagging doubts creep in both about what one has said and about the silences. I plead guilty to a number of quite loud silences in my earlier intervention in "Haș socialism failed?". Let me touch briefly on some of these silences.

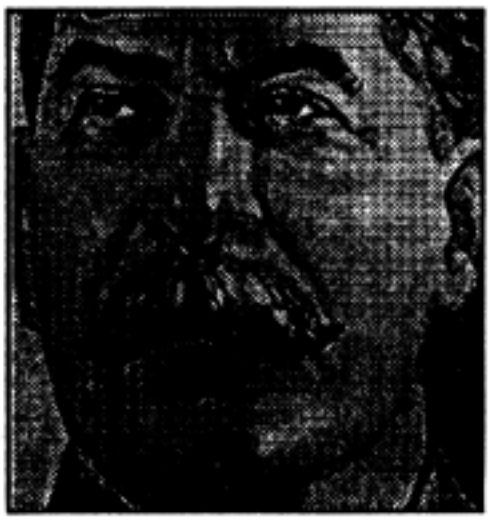
In the first place there is a silence which correctly looms large in Pallo Jordan's critique of my intervention (*South African Labour Bulletin*, no3 1990, p66), in which he says that I "identified the symptoms of the illness but not its basic causes".[1]

It is obviously not enough to describe the Stalinist distortions and the effects.[2] In the interests of future revolutionary practice we need to identify both the origins of Stalinism and the social and economic context in which it was reproduced. These two questions are connected but are, at the same time, distinct. Marx's famous dictum from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, will help us reflect on them:

"Men (and no doubt women too - JS) make their own history. But they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past", with the *economic circumstances playing an ultimately decisive role.*

Clearly, the *reproduction* of Stalinism in actually existing socialism had a significant portion of its roots in the emergence of a strata with an *economic interest* to achieve and maintain a dominant and privileged position; a point which should have found a place in my earlier intervention.[3] But as a total explanation, this simplified form of economic determinism has its limits. It throws little light on the origins of Stalinism and even less light on the remedy.

For example an explanation of Stalinism which *restricts* itself to class reductionism immediately poses the following problem: Socialism, by definition, is not an egalitarian society. Economic reward is determined by contribution rather than by need. This implies economic differentials and, therefore, the existence within a socialist order of economically privileged layers, including a state bureaucracy. A vulgar determinist application of Marxism would ground a conclusion that there was a degree of inevitability for the emergence of Stalinism as a system designed to reproduce and increase the economic differentials of socialist society. But this is clearly a faulty argument.



STALIN: Inevitable?

I agree with Pallo Jordan that what happened in the Soviet Union was not inevitable, that "Soviet leadership faced a range

of alternatives at all the crucial points in its history", and that its actual choices (influenced by a combination of objective and subjective factors) influenced the course of the whole socialist project.

It is clear that some of the roots of Stalinism as a policy option became embedded prior to the emergence of a ruling strata which later used it to protect, expand and reproduce its economic privileges at the expense of its own workers constituency. In other words, *the foundation for the institutionalised separation of socialism and democracy, both in the Party and in society, was laid in ideological practices which preceded the emergence of an economically privileged strata.* It certainly cannot be access to power or economic privilege which explains the fact that outside the Soviet Union tens of millions of communists including our own South African Party embraced Stalinism, not merely in the sense of blind Soviet Union worship, but also in their internal political practices and forms of organisation.[4]

Quite a few of the outstanding leaders of the Bolshevik revolution (including Trotsky, Bukharin, Kamenev and Radek) who came to be "oppositionists" to Stalinism, not only played a significant role in erecting part of its theoretical edifice, but also encouraged some of its practices before Stalin was in the saddle and long before the emergence of an economically privileged strata. This, of course, did not happen in a intellectual vacuum and cannot be explained by purely subjective factors. Many undemocratic practices are unavoidable during periods of illegality and during exceptional periods of counter-revolutionary chaos. But exceptions too often became the rule instead of merely proving it. The danger began when, in the words of Rosa Luxemburg: "they make a virtue of necessity and want to freeze into a complete theoretical system all the tactics forced upon them by ... fatal circumstances, and want to recommend them to the international proletariat as a model of socialist tactics" (*The Russian Revolution*, p78).

Among the "oppositionists" who poured a great deal of concrete into the foundations of Stalinism was Leon Trotsky. Isaac Deutscher's biography documents Trotsky's contribution to transforming the trade unions into little more than state apparatuses. In his book *Terrorism and Communism*, published in 1920, Trotsky's thesis on the "corruption of the masses" by the previous system led him to a concept which substituted a Party dictatorship for a class dictatorship. It also advocated "the militarisation of labour" and insisted that " the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the Party". He maintained that it would be making a "fetish of democratic principles" if there was an insistence on "the workers right to elect representatives above the Party" (Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, p508). Even as late as 1937 Trotsky justified the Stalinist policy of subordinating the Soviets politically to the Party (*Trotsky, Stalinism and Bolshevism*, p22). I believe we should exercise some caution before accepting comrade Pallo Jordan's rather sweeping judgement that we must turn to the works of "oppositionists" (including Trotsky) to discover the true meaning of the communist vision (*SALB*, no3 1990, p74). We should certainly study their works, but we are likely, in the case of some of them, to discover quite a few ideological positions which also degrade the ideas of communism.

The subjective and "voluntarist" roots of Stalinism are, of course, only part of the picture. But their importance for the integ-

rity of socialist political organisation is fundamental. **It is absolutely vital to create mechanisms which will effectively institutionalise inner Party democracy and prevent the emergence of all powerful cult figures or a small leadership collective which exercises a dictatorship over the Party.**

At the level of the state (leaving aside periods of counter- revolutionary chaos) it is the elected representatives of the people that must have full power to rule, and not a Party which proclaims itself as the vanguard of all society by law. Had this been the case in the countries of existing socialism, the tendencies towards the reproduction and institutionalisation of bureaucratic and economic privilege could have been inhibited and, in time, eliminated with the construction of an economic base which would eventually make possible economic egalitarianism.

Another silence in my earlier intervention relates to the place of Leninism in the body of Marxist learning. I believe that a sizeable portion of the diet of so-called Leninism on which we were all nourished, is really repackaged Stalinism. Much of it was Stalinism in search of legitimation. Moments of specific revolutionary practice which were presented as universal and timeless maxims of Marxism served to rationalise undemocratic methods both within the Party and in society.

The paraphernalia of undemocratic practices, which may have been unavoidable during exceptional periods, became codified as a model for a Leninist Party throughout the world. *What is to be Done?*, Lenin's great work written in 1902, became our organisational bible. The concept of the Party set out in *What is to be Done?* is wholly inappropriate and inapplicable in conditions of legality and even more so when power is achieved. Is there, on reflection, anything more unreal for the real world, than the elevation of this brilliant work by Lenin (which catered for the building of an illegal or semi-legal Party in Czarist conditions) into the kind of catechism it became for most of us?

Another aspect presented as a permanent feature of Leninism is the Stalinist version of the vanguard Party, essentially devoid of real democratic content both in relation to inner party functioning and in relation to society. It is a concept and a practice which emerged during periods of illegality and found further expression during the moments of revolutionary upheaval and counter-revolutionary assault. I have no quarrel with the thesis that, in the latter conditions, complete democracy is not always practical. But under the guise of universal Leninism, the lack of democracy was given a permanent place in socialist civil society.

The same could be said of the concept of the single party state. This concept has virtually no pedigree or even mention in the classics of Marxism.

It reflects a very special moment in a very special country's history. But it too was turned into a universal Leninist prescription. Henceforth, it was no longer relevant whether or not the Party had the support of society or even of the class it claimed to represent. Its monopoly of leadership is guaranteed by law and not by political support. No-one is allowed to question its mandate and, eventually, the same applied to the membership in relation to the leadership. All this is in the name of Leninism! And it became a short run from the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat to the notion which was its substantial application in practice - the dictatorship over the proletariat which, without exception, joined

in the popular upsurge in all the countries of Eastern Europe.

We also need to open up discussion on the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat (DOP) and its place in the context of longer term socialist aspirations. There are two ways of posing the question. In my earlier contribution (*Has Socialism Failed?*) I made the point that: "the term `dictatorship of the proletariat' reflected the historical truth that in class divided social formations state power is ultimately exercised by, and in the interests of the class which owns and controls the means of production. It is in this sense that capitalist formations were described as a `dictatorship of the bourgeoisie' whose rule would be replaced by a `dictatorship of the proletariat' during the socialist transition period. In the latter case power would, however, be exercised in the interests of the overwhelming majority of the people and should lead to an ever expanding genuine democracy - both political and economic. On reflection, the choice of the word `dictatorship' to describe this type of society certainly opens the way to ambiguities and distortions."

Apart from the way the term came to be abused and progressively denuded of its intrinsic democratic content, it is questionable whether the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat ever had validity in the context of longer term socialist aspirations. Can we equate the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie (in itself a much oversimplified concept in some Marxist works) with what is claimed to be its legitimate Leninist converse for civil society - the dictatorship of the proletariat? Leaving aside unique moments of revolutionary chaos, the socialist project when in power should surely exercise such power in the interests of the whole of society, a claim which constitutes the essence of *The Communist Manifesto.*

It is therefore both false and harmful to elevate what can, at most, be a transient necessity in unique circumstances into a universal and permanent prescription for socialist government.

The programmatic adoption of the concept of the DOP by virtually all communist parties had its starting point at the 1902 congress of the RSDLP on the initiative of Plekhanov. It was soon radically adjusted to reflect the realities of the struggle against Czarism; the immediate Bolshevik objective moved from the DOP to the **"revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the working class and peasantry"**.

One thing is clear, with the defeat of the intervention, victory in the civil war and the neutralisation of the economic dominance of the exploiting classes, the concept of the DOP lost whatever disputed validity it might have had. Its perpetuation provided a "Leninist" mantle under which Stalinism was able to flourish. The external threat with its internal agents, both real and invented, provided the rationalisation for the thesis that the stronger socialism grew the more intense the class struggle became. The external threat from imperialism and fascism was certainly real, but the vast chasm between socialism and democracy made the whole system more, and not less, vulnerable to these threats.

The post-1985 attempts to combat Stalinism and to repair the damage it wrought to the whole fabric of existing socialism have, by no means, yet assured the survival of the system even in the Soviet Union. The Gorbachev revolution, whose main thrust of perestroika and glasnost provides a basis for a renovated democratic socialism, is going through uncertain times.

In retrospect, it is easier to appreciate

the gargantuan scale of the dilemma which has faced the post-1985 anti-stalinist reformers. The party bureaucracy was so pervasive and dominant at all levels that society could not be democratised without first democratising the Party itself. At the same time Stalinism had so congealed the life of the Party that it could not itself be democratised without pressures which would come from a democratised civil society. Perhaps the serious blockages in the attempted Gorbachevian revolution can be partially attributed to the fact that the efforts to begin the democratisation of the Party lagged too far behind the processes that were unleashed in society as a whole.

Enough has been said about the failure of both capitalism and socialism in the North. What about the prospects for socialism in the overwhelmingly peasant, underdeveloped South, i.e. the colonial and formerly colonial world in which various modes of production - pre-capitalist and capitalist - co-exist? This question was first posed at the 1921 2nd Congress of the Comintern and led to a vigorous debate between Lenin and the Indian communist leader Roy. It was generally agreed that these countries lacked an adequate economic and class foundation for an advance towards socialism. Was it possible, in such circumstances, to by-pass capitalism and to advance the slogan of Soviet power? The answer given by the Congress was a qualified yes. It was possible, said the Congress, to skip the capitalist phase if the socialist world came to the aid of the underdeveloped world with "all the resources at their disposal". And it was believed that workers' power would very soon be victorious in most of advanced capitalist Europe.

As it turned out, the Soviet Union - with a most backward economic legacy - was to stand alone until post-1945 when socialist power expanded in countries most of which had underdeveloped economies with capitalism still in its formative stages. The expanded socialist sector proved quite incapable of devoting significant economic resources to help the socialist oriented forces in the newly-independent underdeveloped countries. The latter were virtually complete hostages to the capitalist-controlled raw material and financial world markets. In the economic sense, it was a misnomer to talk of the "world socialist system".

The few countries in Africa which adopted a socialist perspective had neither an economic foundation which could support an immediate advance towards socialism nor a working class strong enough to sustain it politically. In retrospect it is clear that, in such circumstances, and in the absence of a world socialist economy into which they could integrate, the projection of an immediate socialist perspective was premature.

The transformation of liberation movements such as FRELIMO and MPLA into "Marxist-Leninist vanguards" often undermined their popular base. Slogans about a socialist path had little meaning for the bulk of the people who were overwhelmingly peasant. Indeed, some of the premature leaps into collective and state forms of production in the countryside resulted in a serious deterioration of living standards. We should not, of course, underestimate the havoc caused by externally-supported banditry in some of these countries. But, here again, the popular and multi-class social base needed to effectively counter such subversion was unduly narrowed by premature "socialist" economic measures and an unjustified assault on deeply-felt cultural and religious traditions.

It is not being suggested that there is

only place for a Marxist organisation when the socialist project is immediately on the agenda. Indeed, in our own South African conditions our Party has been, and continues to be, an indispensable instrument of working class aspirations even though the immediate content of the struggle is national democratic rather than socialist in character. We support the inter-class liberation alliance, headed by the ANC. We work to safeguard the role and interests of the working class both as part of this alliance and as an independent social force.

We accept the reality and necessity that our post-apartheid economy will be a mixed economy.

We, however, make no secret of our Party's objective to ensure that the mix has an increasingly socialist orientation. Nor do we hide our commitment to work as speedily as possible for the creation of political and economic conditions in which an advance towards socialism will be possible. We see this as a process and not as something that can be conjured up out of revolutionary-sounding cliches and slogans.

I have alluded briefly to our own experience in order to emphasise the point that the art of revolutionary marxist leadership is not confined to the time when socialism becomes an immediately realisable objective.

The interests of an existing or developing working class may, in given conditions, be better served, and the future of socialism be more assured, by a policy which attempts to remove the obstacles towards socialism rather than one that pretends that they do not exist. In Africa most of the attempts to pole-vault into socialism, ignoring unavoidable interim phases, not only proved a failure but also tarnished the vision of true socialism in the eyes of many ordinary people. ★

REFERENCES

1. In mitigation, but not justification, my pamphlet was an extremely hurried intervention in the midst of the Eastern European uprisings, in response to pressure from our Party ranks to provide a launching pad for further debate. My mind was focussed less on identifying the roots of Stalinism and almost exclusively on the need to engage in ideological battle with those who still defended Stalinism, or questioned its existence.
2. I use the term "Stalinism" to denote the bureaucratic authoritarian style of leadership (of parties both in and out of power) which denuded the Party and the practice of socialism of most of its democratic content and concentrated power in the hands of a tiny, self-perpetuating elite. Thus "Stalinism" was not invented by Stalin; it was used and perfected by him to destroy democratic opposition both inside and outside the Party, and to entrench privilege, economic and social, accruing to the Party and state bureaucracy and related layers of society.
3. I use the formulation "strata" to avoid entering the debate on whether it constituted a class, a neo-class, a bureaucratic bourgeoisie, or whatever.
4. I am truly astonished by Pallo Jordan's misreading of aspects of my contribution despite his claim to have "read and re-read comrade Slovo's pamphlet". A case in point is his remarks that "one cannot accept at face value comrade Joe Slovo's claims that the SACP has always been non-Stalinist" (p.74). I made no such claim; I suggest he re-reads once again my page 24 in which I not only stress our own share of responsibility for the spread of Stalinism but also say:

"It would, of course, be naive to imagine that a movement can, at a stroke, shed all the mental baggage it has carried from the past. And our 7th Congress emphasised the need for on-going vigilance. It noted some isolated reversions to the past, including attempts to engage in intrigue and factional activity in fraternal organisations, sectarian attitudes towards some non-party colleagues, and sloganised dismissals of views which do not completely accord with ours.

"The implications for socialism of the Stalinist distortions have not yet been evenly understood throughout our ranks. We need to continue to search for a better balance between advancing party policy as a collective and the toleration of on-going debate and even constructive dissent." (p24)

Perestroika in the Soviet Union

Slava Tetekhin

In this article, specially written for *The African Communist*, Slava Tetekhin, a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and a consultant for the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, considers the significance and implications of Perestroika

Perestroika in the Soviet Union arouses wide interest in the world. The national democratic revolution in South Africa is also the focus of attention. Some observers consider the processes of democratic renewal in the Soviet Union and South Africa to be the most dynamic in the world at present. There are, though, also many expressions of concern. Do the changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe represent revolution or counter-revolution? Do they encourage the development of socialism or a reversion to capitalism? In what way will these changes influence the democratic movement in South Africa?

The answer to these questions would be incomplete without a brief review of how the Soviet Union emerged. Capitalism started to develop in Russia rather late. Serfdom was abolished only in 1861, and the absolute monarchy survived until 1917. Capitalist development was checked by the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914, which later turned into a still more devastating Civil War that lasted till 1921. Russia's economy was completely ruined and the country started building a new society not from zero, but, in a sense, from minus zero.

'We shall restore them' is the title of this poster, produced in 1988 during attempts to strengthen the alliance between workers and peasants

The proletariat that had just started to emerge was either destroyed during World War 1 and the Civil War, or it became declassed as a result of industrial ruin. By the time of the revolution the population of Russia was still dominated by the peasantry, which comprised some 80% of the population. Russia was very far from the

classical, highly developed society on the basis of which, according to Marx and Engels, the transition to socialism should be started.

Did the Bolsheviks know that they were initiating a new historic process under such unfavourable conditions? Yes, they did. But there was no adventurism in what they started, and the popular support for the 1917 October Revolution proved this. The conditions for revolution were mature, and the Bolsheviks' task was to lead and to guide it. Was there an alternative? Yes, there was. Power was about to be seized by the counter-revolutionary dictatorship, which in due time might have passed along the "regular" path of capitalist development. But this would have slowed down the country's social development for many decades.

The Revolution of 1917 was accomplished in a country that represented a weak link in the chain of international capitalism. That made it easier for the Bolsheviks to seize power. But the late capitalist development impeded the task of building a new society.

At its very beginning, the Revolution suffered a great loss. In 1924, VI Lenin died. He had just started to create a long-term concept of a new society, based on the situation as it was after the Revolution and the Civil War. Lenin's view of the Russia of the future was distorted by his successors. The strategy of placing prime emphasis on the development of heavy industry, to strengthen the country's defence potential (in view of the approaching new World War) was correct. But it was carried out at the expense of forced agricultural collectivisation and the virtual robbery of the peasantry. The consequences of agricultural destruction are still having their impact on our country today.

The administrative command system over the economy and over society at large had begun to take shape. The nationalisation of industry was a decision forced upon the Bolsheviks through acts of sabotage by big business. But the nationalisation process in Stalin's model did not give the means of production to the people. On the contrary, it alienated the means of production from the immediate producers. At the same time working people were cut off from real political power. Stalin's purges took the lives of thousands of the most capable people. The Soviets, the organs of popular power, had power in theory. In practice, power was increasingly held by the bureaucracy.

The German fascist invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 once again resulted in tremendous destruction of the economy. 27 million people were killed. During the space of a mere 30 years (from 1914 to 1945) the Civil War, and two World Wars, brought total devastation to our country.

But even in this new society, so remote from the Marxist ideal, socialism began to prove its historical potential. Famine and unemployment were done away with. Free education and free health care were introduced. The Soviet Union began to take up an important position in the world economy.

Heavy industry had been developed within an extremely short period of time, and this made it possible to defeat the industrial might of fascist Germany. It should be stressed that the victory of the Soviet Union in World War 2 was to a great extent a technological victory. Without belittling the mass heroism of the Red Army, by the end of the war the Soviet army had more sophisticated weapons than the Nazis. In 1961 the Soviet Union was the first country in the world to achieve manned

flight into space, and that was only 16 years after a devastating war.

By the middle of the 1960s the faults of Stalin's model of socialism had already been felt. The attempt at perestroika (restructuring) by the then prime minister, Kosygin was confronted by the bureaucracy, headed at that time by Leonid Brezhnev. For the next 18 years stagnation and irresponsibility ruled. That meant not only marking time, but going backwards. Stagnation destroyed even what had been achieved under Stalin's model of socialism.

And what about the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (the CPSU)? During the Stalin purges in the 1930s, communists, leaders of the revolution and of the first years of socialist construction, were killed. The Communist Party, in the Leninist sense of its functions and tasks, was destroyed. It became part of the administrative command system. As such, it no longer needed the support of its social base - workers, peasants, intelligentsia.

It was the loss of this social base (and not primarily disappointment in Marxism and socialism, as some claim) that explains the unexpectedly rapid loss of leadership, at the first sign of crisis, by the Communist Parties in the East European countries. Some fraternal parties in Eastern Europe, to be frank, did try to start a process of perestroika already in the 1960s, but their attempts were cut short by the leaders of Stalin's model of socialism.

The social sciences also have become major victims of Stalinism. A set of dogmas presented as "Marxism Leninism" (but which had only a formal relation to this living and developing body of thought) constituted the ideological backbone of the system. Millions of people were, in fact, denied the knowledge of real Marxism Leninism. Hence the stagnation in the theoretical understanding of modern developments, and the confusion when faced with new tendencies. Hence, also, the related absurd accusation that Marx and Lenin did not foresee 100 and 150 years ago modern social processes. Marxism Leninism was never intended to be a set of timeless dogmas.

The initial shock caused not so much by the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe, as by the collapse of our image of socialism, is gradually wearing off. The shock ended the era of self conceit and self admiration that brought us to the crisis. Future developments may produce still greater problems, but it is already clear that one should have a calm and sound evaluation of the situation. And, one should act.

If we recall the Russian proverb, more or less analogous to the English one that "Every cloud has a silver lining", it is possible to point out at least two extremely important positive trends in modern developments:

1. The sharp rise in mass political awareness. Increasingly the masses are realising that it is they who are the masters of their fortune, and that it is they who set history in motion.

2. The considerable increase in theoretical debate. What is particularly important is that the debate is going on at the grassroots level, and not merely among professionals. Of course, the debate has produced a great variety of perspectives. One does, indeed, hear remarks like "Marxism is out of fashion", or "the socialist way is not for Russia", which are a joy to the ears of Western propaganda, "proving the collapse of Communist ideology". But it is exactly in the process of challenging such views at the grassroots level, that a real theoretical understanding of the past and the direc-

tion for the future will develop.

Today Western propaganda claims that Marxism has failed completely. There is nothing new in anti-communism. Attacks on Marxism began at its birth. "Throughout the civilised world the teachings of Marx evoke the utmost hostility and hatred of all bourgeois science (both official and liberal)", wrote Lenin in 1908. In 1913 he stressed that bourgeois "science will not even hear of Marxism, declaring that it has been refuted and annihilated. Marx is attacked with equal zest by young scholars who are making a career by refuting socialism, and by decrepit elders who are preserving the traditon of all kinds of outworn systems."

It is true, Marx and Engels did have notions which were incorrect, owing to the inadequacy of scientific knowledge at the time. It is true that they also had notions which were correct at the time, but which are now no longer valid, owing to changed historic conditions. But, in general, their method retains its historic value.

One of the fundamental tenets of Marxist theory is that "the theoretical conclusions of Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented or discovered by this or that reformer. They merely express in general terms actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from an historical movement going on before our very eyes".

Marx and Engels never considered their views to be the ultimate truth. Engels wrote in *Anti-Duhring*: "...in all probability we are just about at the beginning of human history, and the generations that will put us right are likely to be far more numerous than those whose knowledge we, often enough with a considerable degree of contempt, have the opportunity to correct."

It is clear now that the transition to socialism is not an easy thing. It will take much time. However, capitalism started in Italy in the 15th century. The English bourgeois revolution occurred between 1640 and 1660. The great French Revolution started in 1789. The bourgeois revolution in Germany only occurred in the middle of the last century. So it took capitalism nearly 500 years to triumph over feudalism. It would be pure idealism to suppose the transition from capitalism to socialism could be a smooth path, a triumphant ascent without a break. We ourselves invented a mythical image of a socialist society free of problems and crises. When confronted with problems we rush to the opposite extreme.

In his work, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*, Engels wrote: "...wherever there is a revolutionary convulsion, there must be some social need in the background which is prevented by outworn institutions from satisfying itself...Every attempt at forcible repression will only bring it forth stronger and stronger, until it bursts its fetters. If, then, we have been beaten, we have nothing else to do but to begin again from the very beginning."

To think that socialism is defeated and there is a future only for the capitalist way of production is as absurd as believing that the steam engine was the highest achievement of humankind. To think that humankind can make enormous qualitative leaps in science and technology, and yet still accept eternal serfdom (even if in the shape of the "free" sale and purchase of labour), or still accept the existence of antagonistic classes, with the minority flourishing at the expense of the majority - this is to deny the possibility of progress to humankind.

The problem is not with socialism or Marx. Marx systematised what had been

achieved in the three most advanced countries in the 19th century : German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism. In the middle of the last century the historical limits of capitalism, a social model built on the exploitation of one person by another, became evident. Capitalism, to be sure, still retains possibilities for self-adaptation and renewal. But this does not mean that, from the longer, historical point of view, its prospects for survival have improved.

The capitalist propaganda machine tries to assert that the historic competition between the two systems (capitalism and socialism) is over, as if the end of history will arrive with the year 2000. In fact, we are still only at the beginnings of this competition. Temporary setbacks do not change the general process of history.

How then should one view the complex and painful changes that are now taking place in the Soviet Union and other East European countries? I believe this is the beginning of the transition period from Stalin's model of socialism, which has already outlived itelf (and which was a blind alley from the start), to a model that will, to a much greater extent, reflect the evolution of humankind to a more just and harmonious social order. The roots of the problem are not in Marxism-Leninism, but in the departure from its principles, and in the failure to develop its theoretical and practical foundations.

We must get rid of the idea that socialism is the property of the Soviet Union or other socialist countries. We must drop the notion that Lenin is owned by the Soviet Union, and that it is only for us to judge the correctness of his conclusions. Marx, Engels and Lenin belong to all the people of the world. It is up to humankind to decide on the possible ways of developing their ideas.

'The reasons for the loss of trust in the party ought to be sought in the party's monopoly on power which was bound to corrupt'

It is good that we are getting rid of the idea that the Soviet model of socialism is the only possible one. It is precisely this notion that has opened the way to our class antagonists to crow about "the decline of socialism". Each country will find its own way to socialism, according to the particular historical conditions it confronts. On the one hand, this is likely to make the transition period from the old to the new society more difficult - there will be no ready-made blueprints. On the other hand, it makes it easier. It is better to work out your own model that will, in the end, really be viable, than to adjust to a known but alien model.

Was it only the influence of the Soviet Union that led the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America to the socialist path? Surely there are intrinsic causes within their own countries that lie at the core of their choice. But the objective and subjective conditions in their countries often demanded their own unique paths to socialism, not the Soviet one. Uncritical borrowing of the Soviet model resulted in transplanting the shortcomings of this model into other countries.

The present changes in Eastern Europe, however painful and contradictory, will ultimately pave the way for a more sound socialist transformation, than the dogmatic following of an outworn model. It is still to be seen whether the peoples of Eastern Europe will accept renewed capitalist exploitation and the disappearance of the social achievements of the last 40 years as easily as they accept the change of symbols and the rhetoric of their politicians.

Western cheers at the failure of socialism are a bit premature. Socialism needs restructuring just like any other social system. And that will strengthen it in the long run. The present capitalist system was formed in the course of a number of crises, and in the face of a struggle against attempts to restore feudalism, a system that had been declared to be (like capitalism today) eternal and a God-given social order. Socialism will also go through a number of crises in the process of developing and perfecting itself. This is quite natural. Any historical process develops only in and through contradictions.

It is from this point of view that one must consider another development that is being presented as evidence of the crisis of communist ideology. This is the decrease in Communist Parties' membership, and in many East European cases, the loss of their leadership role. As a rule these Communist parties had outsized memberships - in the Soviet Union with a population of 280 million, the Party had 20 million members. But the Party was not supposed to be a front or broad social movement. It was, as Lenin suggested, meant to be a vanguard political organisation. Many people joined the Communist Parties, which were ruling parties, to make a career.

The essence of the ruling Communist Parties' problems is neatly summed up by the Polish political activist, M Rakovsky, in an interview in *Pravda*: "...the reasons for the loss of trust in the party ought to be sought in the party's monopoly on power which was bound to corrupt. This is an historical law, and this is indeed what happened. This is not unique to socialism. The monopolisation of power, the conviction that `we know best' what is good and what is bad for the people, the underrating of the views of working people, while constantly assuring them that we are attentive to the people's voice, the bureaucratisation of the administration, especially of the party apparatus which was raised above the state and the people - these are the main reasons behind the growing public protests, and the reluctance of the people to continue following the party."

For some Soviet "intellectuals" capitalism has suddenly become a system without any problems. (And in general, for such people perestroika means simply inverting all the old values, putting positive signs where there were negative signs before, and vice versa.) Capitalism has undoubtedly proved to be dynamic and adaptable, and this has given it considerable strength in its competition with socialism. But, at the same time, its negative features have deepened and become accentuated. Lenin foresaw the new strategy of capitalist survival in his work, *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*: "...capitalism has now singled out a handful (less than one-tenth of the inhabitants of the globe) of exceptionally rich and powerful states which plunder the whole world simply by `clipping coupons'".

Too often the comparison between capitalism and socialism is based on a comparison between the European capitalist and European socialist countries. The living standards of Western European

countries are indeed higher. But the question why is never properly answered. It cannot be properly answered unless we take into account the problem of very different levels from which these countries started out. But even more importantly, you cannot assess the wealth of Western Europe in isolation of the capitalist system as a whole. The difference in per capita income between the capitalist "North" and the capitalist "South" is 10 to 1. The difference between the richest and poorest country within the world capitalist system is 260 to 1. Can such a social order, based on such striking social inequality, a world-wide apartheid, last long?

What is the possible impact of the changes in the Soviet Union and in the East European countries on South Africa? Well, that is for South Africans themselves to decide. But it may be useful, as an outsider, to offer some thoughts.

In the first place, the apartheid regime and its Western allies are obviously doing everything they can to use the difficulties of perestroika to discredit, or at least to lessen the inspiring impact of socialist ideas on many South Africans. Perhaps our difficulties here in the Soviet Union might have some impact on peoples' outlook in your country, but they can hardly halt or disrupt long-term developments. The dissatisfaction that the people of South Africa feel, and their striving for a new society, are not something imported from the Soviet Union.

Support for socialism among workers and large sections of the democratic movement in South Africa is not something introduced from the outside. The attraction of these ideas for the people at large is determined by the conditions of their lives. These conditions inevitably push South Africans to search for alternative ways to develop their society.

Political awareness in South Africa is exceptionally high.

If there were a mechanism for measuring mass politicisation, South Africa's would be one of the highest in the world. This is a fact that, more than anything, deeply worries the ruling group in South Africa and its allies in the West.

If we consider the degree to which both subjective and objective conditions have matured in South Africa today, then these may prove to be considerably more advanced than in Russia in 1917. This does not mean that the socialist revolution is immediately possible. The historical situation has changed since the earlier part of the century. The methods of imperialist adjustment have been perfected. But the existence of conditions for a quick (that is from an historical point of view) and drastic transformation cannot be doubted.

Progressive ideas have been confronted by outdated social structures throughout the history of humankind. The great social goal of finally abolishing the exploitation of one person by another will not be achieved in a matter of several years or several decades. After all, societies based on class oppression have been existing for thousands of years.

But the future of humankind depends upon the achieving of this great goal. In our revolutionary impatience we have been concentrating for too long on the question: When will socialism win? It is clear now that the fundamental question is not "when" but "how". ★

We owe a duty to the future

Pioneer Maqhawe

"Pioneer Maqhawe" is the pen-name of an MK comrade presently serving a long prison term on Robben Island. This article is a contribution to the continuing debate on the problems of socialism, and is, specifically, a response to Harry Gwala's "Let us Look at History in the Round", *The African Communist*, no.123, 4th quarter 1990

In my view, and without suggesting any completeness about it, Joe Slovo's pamphlet, *Has Socialism Failed?*, is a fairly well balanced and important contribution to Marxist theory in our time. In the words of Jeremy Cronin, the pamphlet "was quite a courageous contribution as well, when most left forces around the world were just in confusion"[1] and, perhaps one could add, on the verge of despair. There are, in my view, some shortcomings in the pamphlet. But to suggest, as Harry Gwala does, that the pamphlet is unscientific and one-sided in its "approach to a complicated problem" (see "Let us Look at History in the Round") is to hide the whole gigantic truth behind a reed.

Well, great truth does not reach every ear or eye. It will never reach some. With still others it will reach them like the light of a distant star ...when it is too late. I am in total agreement with Gorbachev that what is most valuable in Marxist theory is the idea of constant movement and development, and a rigorous respect for the truth. We should detest lies, and resent anyone who makes one-sided judgments and pretends to have absolute knowledge of what is going to happen and what should be done. "The Stalinist model of socialism should not be confused with true socialist theory", writes Gorbachev. "As we dismantle the Stalinist system, we are not retreating from socialism, but moving towards it."[2]

Like many world and South African revolutionaries, I find myself unable to accept that under the leadership of Stalin there were simply "many excesses committed" and wrong interpretations of events in internal politics of the Soviet Union, as comrade Harry Gwala would like us to believe. There were not merely "excesses", but hideous crimes against humanity that were committed on the direct instructions of Stalin. They were crimes of a character totally contrary to scientific socialism.

Dialectical materialism does not only demand of us that we look at things "in the round", from all sides, and not be one-sided in our approach. It also demands of us that we must speak about everything openly, and conduct our affairs with the utmost sincerity. In my view, the criticism that has recently developed of Stalin and his version of "socialism" as remote from real socialist theory and practice is legitimate. As is the criticism of Stalinist meth-

ods of work and the moral and psychological climate imposed on scientific activity.

To begin with, Stalinism was a regime in which one man held absolute power of a kind which Lenin never remotely had or showed any desire to achieve. Stalin used that power to the full, not least for herding millions of Soviet citizens into prison camps, and for the slaughtering of countless others, including vast numbers of people in the upper layers of Soviet society. This devastation of all ranks of Soviet society, which under Stalin was a recurring phenomenon, was unprecedented in its scale. The Soviet Marxist historian, Roy Medvedev makes the point with a stunning observation: "the NKVD [Stalin's secret police] arrested and killed, within two years, more Communists than had been lost in all the years of the underground struggle, the three revolutions, and the Civil War."[3]

This scale of repression, Stalin's holocaust, is so vast as to discredit the notion of mere "excesses" or mistakes. Moreover, repression on such a scale required a gigantic police apparatus that reached into every corner of Soviet life, not only to arrest, deport and execute, but to maintain detailed surveillance over Soviet citizens who were not imprisoned and to guard those who were. This was an exceedingly elaborate system which was quite deliberately woven into the tissue of the larger social system, decisively affecting its total pattern.

Another characteristic of Stalinism was that it required from the people a positive and even enthusiastic acceptance of whatever line, policy, position and attitude was dictated from on high, and however much it might contradict the immediately preceding one. This applied not only to major aspects of policy, but to every conceivable aspect of life and thought. Conformity was demanded in literature and music, foreign policy and in five-year plans, not to mention Stalin's own interpretation of Marxism-Leninism and of history (particularly the history of the Russian Revolution). Every sign of opposition was ruthlessly stamped out. Indeed, Stalinism was a system which even stamped out opposition in anticipation. It constantly struck at people who were perfectly willing to conform, on suspicion that they might eventually cease to be willing.

This Stalinist requirement of total conformity was also extended to the world communist movement. Whenever the Stalinist regime could, it physically stamped out opposition or suspected opposition among foreign communists. Three South African communists were arrested in the 1930s in the Soviet Union for speaking out against Stalinism, two of them were sentenced to death and executed (the brothers M. and P. Richter); the third, Lazar Bach, died in a labour camp in north-east Siberia, allegedly of natural causes. Stalin demanded rigid endorsement of every single aspect of the Soviet Union's internal and external policy. In practice this led to the Stalinisation of every single Communist Party throughout the world, in the name of the sacred duty imposed upon every communist to defend the USSR - which rapidly came to mean defending every twist and turn in Soviet policy; denouncing as traitors, renegades and foreign agents anyone (including all but a few of the leading figures of Bolshevism) so

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labelled by the Stalinist leadership; and rejecting vehemently as bourgeois lies any charge levelled at the rulers of "the first workers' state".

As early as 1926 the Italian communist, Atonio Gramsci, warned his comrades about the repercussions that the Stalinisation of every single Communist Party would have on the future of communism in the world. "Our Party", he writes, "is not a democratic party...It is a party centralised both nationally and internationally. In the international field, our party is simply a section of a larger party, a world party ... Centralisation and unity were understood in too mechanical a fashion : the Central Committee, indeed the Executive Committee, was the entire party, instead of representing and leading it. If this conception were applied permanently, the party would lose its distinctive political features and become, at best, an army (and a bourgeois type of army). In other words, it would lose its power of attraction and become separated from the masses." [4]

Stalin's virus soon caught up with the Communist Party of South Africa, and the 1930s were difficult years for it. Party politics became characterised by vindictiveness, accusations and counter-accusations, and sterile personal attacks on Party comrades. All of this was done with the full support of the Comintern. Many comrades were removed from the Party leadership, and more were expelled. The Party lost influence among the masses. Bitterness and animosity characterised Party life. [5]

The glorification of the Party

Another characteristic of Stalinism was the glorification of the Party. In so far as the Party meant, in fact, the leadership, and above all its supreme leader, this could be taken as part of the cult of the personality. But the cult of the Party had its own features. It became habitual after Lenin's death to speak of the Party in quasi-religious terms, and to invoke its "unity", whose disruption was subject to the severest penalties.

As early as the 13th CPSU Congress in May 1924, the first after Lenin's death, Trotsky, who had tardily identified himself with the cause of inner-party democracy, nevertheless still spoke of the Party in terms which were of greater comfort to his adversaries in power, than to his allies in opposition. He told the delegates to the Congress that none of them, himself included, could be right against the Party. In the last instance, he said, the Party is always right because it is the only historic instrument which the working class possesses for the resolution of its fundamental tasks. While he refused to back down, as demanded by Zinoviev (then allied to Stalin), Trotsky nonetheless acknowledged that one could not be right against the Party. He believed that one could only be right with the Party and through the Party because history, apparently, had not created any other way for the realisation of one's rightness.

In time, Trotsky changed his mind, but it is instructive to note how these quasi-religious views of the Party continued to disarm generation after generation of revolutionaries in all communist parties. They are part of the explanation for the extreme weakness of the world communist movement's ability to oppose Stalinism in subsequent years, even after Khruschev's revelations in 1956. The conviction was deeply implanted (and Stalinist propaganda did everything to strengthen the conviction) : outside the Party there could be no effective action. This was the case in all communist parties. Opponents in these parties were either subdued or expelled, and in a

number of cases they were politically and physically destroyed.

Although Lenin's name is indissolubly linked with the idea that no revolutionary movement is conceivable without a revolutionary party to lead it, he never invested the Party with the kind of quasi-religious attributes that became habitual after his death. Indeed, a religious frame of mind came to dominate the world communist movement in the years of Stalinism - with "Marxism-Leninism" as its Holy Bible, "the Party" as its Church, and Stalin as its prophet.

Marxism is not a dogma

Comrade Harry Gwala tells us: "The saying that the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat' has been abused and therefore we must shy away from it sends shivers down our spine. Without accusing comrade Joe Slovo of re-writing Marxism-Leninism, we have seen how not so very long ago many parties of Western Europe, after the end of the Second World War, had high expectations about their path to socialism, but when this was blocked by what Lenin aptly calls the international connections of capitalism, these parties embarked on **revisionism** (my emphasis). They talked of `structural reforms' where through the ballot box they would restructure everything until we had socialism. They talked of socialism with a human face. Some of them shied away from the clenched fist and restored the open hand".

Elsewhere, comrade Gwala reminds us that Marxist theory is not a dogma, but a guide to action. That is very true, and I suppose every communist understands that stubborn truth. However, I want to suggest that it is precisely because of that understanding that comrade Joe Slovo was able to question the validity of the concept "dictatorship of the proletariat".

We have, in fact, all too often failed to support innovation either in theory or practice. What is more, we have frequently rejected as "revisionism" new ideas if we found no direct and literal corroboration for them in the basic texts of Marxism-Leninism. In doing this we have overlooked the fact that we are thereby demanding the impossible of the authors of those texts: to foresee every step and every feature of development in all their intricacy would, as Lenin put it, not be in the power of "seventy Marxes".

Marx, Engels and Lenin dealt with the problems of their times. They imparted to us the vast legacy of their achievements and discoveries and of the methodology of dialectical materialism, together with a creative spirit of truth-seeking in science. But any heritage must be wisely used, particularly such a brilliant one as Marxism-Leninism, which by its very nature is anti-dogmatic, having been produced by life itself. It demands constant probing into the secrets of social existence. The essential requirement is that the accumulated theoretical and methodological potential of dialectical thought itself should be directed towards advancing and eliciting new propositions and approaches.

I must agree with Joe Slovo that the abandonment of the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" by most communist parties, including the South African Communist Party, was because the way the term came to be abused bore little resemblance to Lenin's original concept. After the death of Lenin and under the influence of Stalin, the term "was progressively denuded of its intrinsic democratic content and came to signify, in practice, *a dictatorship of a party bureaucracy* (my emphasis)." [6] The crucial task of our Party, in the phase which we are

passing through, consists in winning over the majority of the working class; and any clinging to concepts which have the force of repulsion rather than of attraction must be carefully assessed lest they block this central task of the revolution. Instead of clinging to the concept of a "dictatorship of the proletariat", we must promote the idea of *socialist democracy* and *legality* which the founders of scientific socialism envisaged.

Why stagnation in a socialist economy?

In any socio-economic formation, and at every stage in past history, the contradiction between productive forces and production relations generates revolutions and accelerates progress. But instead of subjecting that same contradiction in socialist society to thorough investigation, many social scientists began dogmatically to assert that under socialism the basic contradiction was between the "visible shoots of communism" and the "survivals of capitalism". Into the category of survivals went everything that was perceived as an obstacle in the way of administrative-bureaucratic methods of management: collective farms, co-operative property, individual plots and personal subsidiary holdings, individual enterprise, commodity production and commodity-money relations, the market, profit and cost-benefit accounting.

Many decades of submission to an authoritarian management system have proved disastrous, not only for Soviet society, but for the socialist community as a whole. It seems that the creation of an inhibitory mechanism can be traced back to the 1930s. The path of extensive economic development (i.e. based on quantitative criteria) was at the time an objective requirement, it corresponded to the tasks that had then to be accomplished, and it produced considerable results. But that same path and the methods of management, planning, distribution and so on connected with it came to be a brake on development at a subsequent, higher stage, when quality factors came to the fore, when the need to go over to intensive forms of economic management arose. Inertia in thinking and practice led to patently inadequate efforts.

AN Shaposhnikov, a Soviet researcher specialising in agrarian questions, tells us that the period of super-industrialisation that began in the 1930s, together with the command-style system of centralised administration, took, for the Russian peasantry, the form of massive collectivisation. During this, the vast majority of the most successful farmers of the NEP period were dispersed and, to a significant degree, physically annihilated. The agricultural sector came under heavy pressure from a system that sought to subject everything to state regulation and control. This new wave gave precedence to the interests and values of the poorest and least educated sections of the rural population, who were inclined for the most part to take life easy and behave in a submissive and conformist way. [7]

The specific role of the agricultural sector was to serve as a source of raw materials for industry during the stage of accelerated industrialisation of Soviet society. The bulk of the income generated by the farming community was drawn off and channelled through centralisation to the towns and cities. The funds made available for social facilities and housing and to raise the rural standard of living were on a very miserable scale. Up to the 1960s, most farm workers had no cash income at all. They received symbolic remuneration in kind (grain, cattle, fodder, vegetables), which was just

enough to keep body and soul together. At the same time, each rural family had to pay state taxes in money and kind (a specific amount of meat, milk, eggs, wool and cash). Almost the only means of support and of paying these taxes was the personal subsidiary holding, the only place where the rural population could still feel they were in control. Most of the rural population therefore lived on the verge of poverty and some were virtually destitute. The level of demand, therefore, was extremely low. The country dweller became accustomed to making do with extremely little. Poverty was one of the characteristic features of the Russian peasantry and its roots are still alive.

The complete domination of the authoritarian administrative system and state ownership of the means of production alienated the farming community from the land and from the means and results of production, stifling creativity and initiative. To a large extent, the peasants lost the habit of and inclination for independence and became passive executors of other people's wills. The agricultural sector was therefore in a critical state at the start of the 1980s, with an increasingly acute shortage of foodstuffs. At the same time, the rural population was displaying symptoms of degradation - there was an upsurge of alcoholism and other forms of deviant behaviour, and an increase in anti-social attitudes. These phenomena were also increasingly manifest in towns and cities.

The main problem was that state ownership was made an absolute, and it was equated with the supreme form of ownership - that of the people as a whole. In practice, this resulted in primacy being given to administration by command, and it left the field even wider open for bureaucracy. Bureaucracy, as we know, thrives on dogmatism, and vice versa. Dogmatism and bureaucratism, working in tandem,

dragged the co-operative system by the ears into the state. A stereotyped attitude to state property gradually developed: "our's is not mine and it is nobody's". This resulted in indifference and mismanagement. By contrast, today many socialist economists are now arguing that it is precisely the co-operative system which can take over functions that the state is not obliged to fulfill, thereby contributing to the normalisation and effective functioning of the socialist market and, in conjunction with the state, strengthening the currency of these countries.

Dogmatism had no need of an exact knowledge of life. Anything that did not fit into its procrustean bed, or did not fit with the practice of universal self-admiration, was accounted - openly or tacitly - as dubious and suspect. The concept of developed socialism was interpreted in an expedient way, leading in the direction of leisurely, timid and inconsistent piecemeal improvement, thus sanctioning complacency and blunting awareness of the urgent need for fundamental changes. Disregard for the socialist principles of co-operation and the attitude of treating individual holdings and individual enterprise as something alien, deprived society of significant potential resources. The glorification of one single component part of the principle of democratic centralism - although a necessary and most important part, namely centralised forms of management - blocked initiative, independence and socialist entrepreneurial spirit. It produced a narrow departmentalism and bureaucracy that became the main control levers of the economic machine. Harm has been done by the disparagement of socialist self-management and by systematic scare-mongering about the so-called unpredictable consequences of wider democracy.

Comrade Harry Gwala tells us that democracy should not be understood in the abstract, and we are often told that there is nothing like "democracy in general", that democracy has always been "class democracy". Neither Slovo nor Gorbachev or any other theoretician of perestroika whose works I have read talk of democracy in the abstract. They talk of democracy as the most important and indeed the only possible means of achieving socialism as a social organism. This implies *socialist democracy*. Marxism by no means reduces the socio-economic essence of socialism to social ownership of the means of production. Socialised production is genuinely socialist when the decisive role in managing production and other public affairs actually belongs to the working people and when the workers' collectives themselves resolve vital economic and social development issues.

Democracy, self-management and the lively initiative of the masses should be key concepts in our political vocabulary, particularly for discussing socialism. We must understand socialist democracy as the participation of working people in discussing the state's legislation and planning; the nomination and election of their representatives for membership of bodies exercising full authority, and control from below of their activity; openness, criticism and self- criticism as methods of political guidance; responsibility and conscious discipline and the equality of all citizens before the law.

Socialist democracy is also connected with the demand for new approaches to the problem of management. Suitable forms and incentives for real participation by people in working out both basic and day-to-day decisions at the level of the country as a whole, of the community and

of the collective, need to be found. The mechanisms whereby democracy is a means of resolving emergent contradictions at all levels need also to be identified as precisely as possible. There is a crying need for communist social scientists to study the whole range of questions of democratic development and its effects on other areas of life, on the human individual, on the formation of political awareness in society, and on managerial and administrative organisation.

For democracy to entrench itself, for it to be seen working at every level of society, special attention needs to be given to improving the quality of the legal sciences. This is where the concept of socialist legality comes in. This covers a huge range of problems, from laying the juridical basis for economic reform to introducing the fundamental changes needed in those sectors of jurisprudence that underpin the economic, political and social rights and freedoms of citizens. The attempts of certain leaders to avoid dealing with urgent problems, coupled with half-hearted departmentalism and narrow-mindedness, did nothing to promote interest in a serious scientific treatment of the issue. The situation can and must now change. The time has come for an understanding of the real value of giving juridical form to social relations, and for the all-round development and effective utilisation of the humanist and moral potential of socialist law. Without law, legality and justice, social progress cannot be achieved, the normal functioning of material production and of the institutions of political democracy cannot be ensured, effective management cannot be instituted, and incentives for the development of the individual cannot be provided.

Marxism teaches us that the legal status and the rights and freedoms of citizens are rooted in the totality of social relations. The law sets down and safeguards what has been formed in real life. However, a conception of the rights of citizens as a bonus granted from above has persisted over a long time, reflecting a failure to grasp the real link that exists in the community between the individual, society, law and the state.

To steer the law in the direction of common sense, turning respect for human dignity into an unconditional priority, constitutes today a most urgent task for legal science and practice in the entire socialist community. Let socialist law reign supreme and socialist democracy shall triumph! ★

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Corridors to corruption

Toussaint

What is the ingredient of power which proves capable of corrupting the most incorruptible? Toussaint asks this question, and tells the tale of 'Uncle'

For the past two years, disarray and confusion have spread through the socialist world, amidst cries of triumph in the capitalist world. "We have won!" the West has trumpeted. "Socialism is dead!". And, even more apocalyptic: "History is finished!" - according to an acclaimed American academic, meaning presumably that now the social system will never change again, and the whole world will be capitalist for ever.

These boasts and predictions follow the evidence of disorders and breakdowns in Eastern Europe. Suddenly the closed, secretive and centralised system of those countries, which has become known as "Stalinism", has begun to unravel. It has become clear beyond any disputing that, in many respects, the practice of socialism has fallen far short of the high ideals of its founding fathers. Marxism promised a future of socialism which would assure the comfort, security and liberty of all the people. But the reality in Eastern Europe has been vastly different. The ideal has not been attained. Instead, socialism as cre-

ated by regimes and parties claiming to be guided by Marxism has created widespread disillusion, even amongst former socialists.

This is not to deny that there have been many admirable facets to Eastern European socialism. But there have also been widespread acts of tyranny and oppression, gross illegalitites and inequalities, and patent economic failures. All the capitalist triumphalism about "the end of socialism" is based only on examination of the negative features.

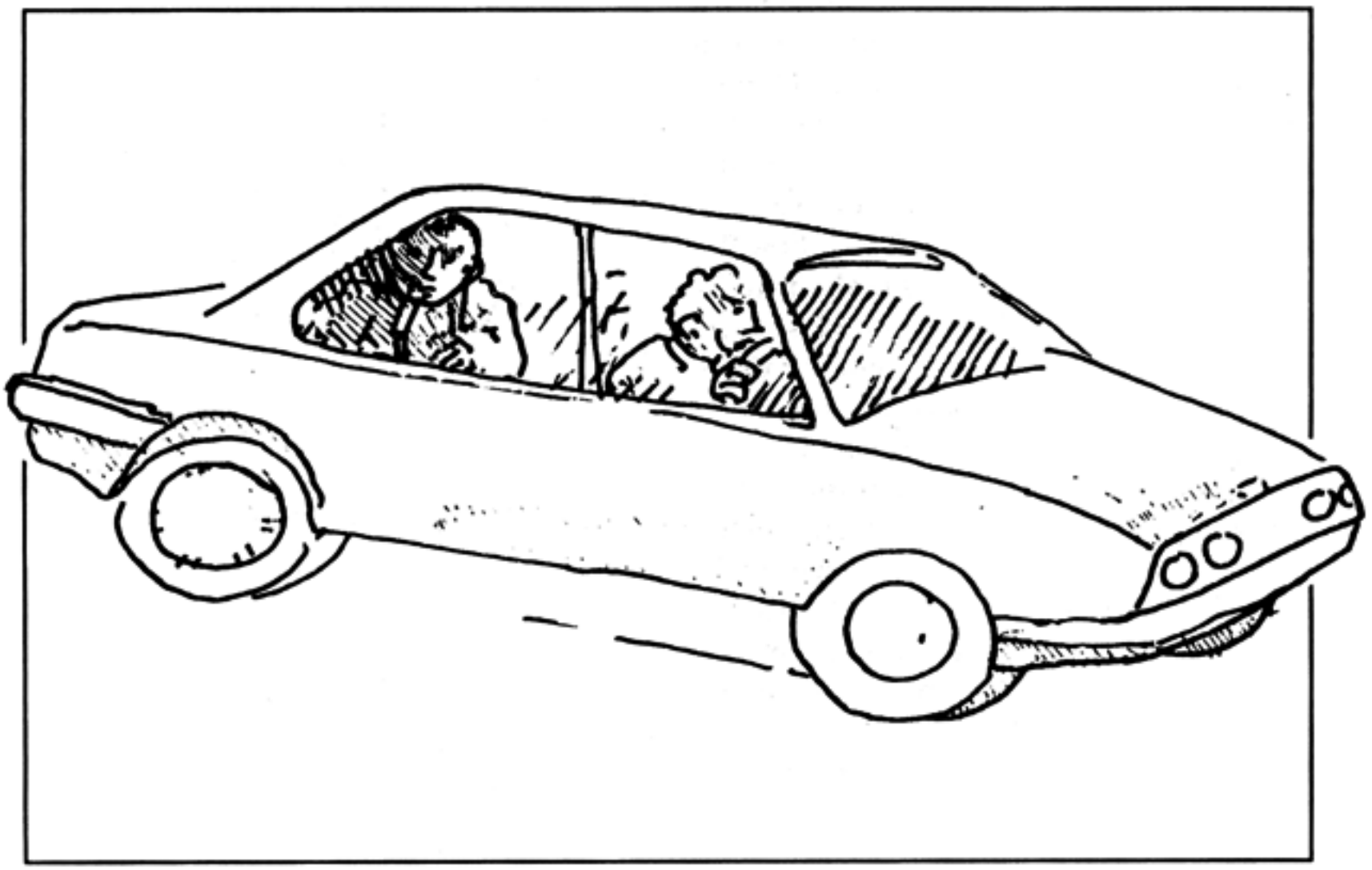
It is, of course, possible to meet criticisms of socialism's ugly negative features by citing the evidence of equally negative features of the capitalist world. The reality of capitalist society is far removed from the vastly over-blown claims made for it in the glossy propaganda sheets and political pulpits. Capitalism too can be viewed as a complex on of ugly, negative features: of multi-million dollar stock exchange frauds as in Japan, the USA and Britain; of promotion of secret wars to destabilise and overthrow democratic regimes; of sinister state agencies like the CIA, setting up puppet dictators to rule through death squads and institutionalised torture; of wanton destruction of the environment; and brutal exploitation of those who are alread poor, in order to enrich the already rich. And so on.

A future for socialism?

But these are debating points. They may counter but do not answer the question which troubles socialists everywhere: Is there any future for socialism? Does Marxism still have any validity?

In considering the present crisis of existing socialism we need to go beyond describing WHAT has happened. We need also to ask HOW did these things happen? And - most importantly - WHY did they happen?

I make no claim to any special wisdom on this matter. Many socialists are taking



the easy course of blaming the leaders for everything that has gone wrong, and thus escaping from the obligation to examine every other aspect of socialist theory and practice. It is not my intention here to try - even if I were able - to make such an examination. I want to try and explore only a single facet of the problem, without claiming that it is necessarily the most important single aspect. I want to try and examine some of the forces that shape the behaviour of leaders of socialism; and try to establish whether it is their characters and personalities which determine the system - or, on the contrary, whether there are factors in the system which create their character and behaviour.

Self-sacrifice

The CVs of the leaders of socialism are almost invariably similar - composed of careers of honest endeavour and self-sacrificing devotion to their cause. Virtually no leader of a socialist movement, who reached that status before it had won state power, will be found to have reached power through the devious means of everyday politics in the Western world - vote-buying, bribery, wheeler-dealing, conspiracy or military coup. Socialist leaders, almost without exception, have come up the hard way - through years of underpaid, unprivileged and demanding struggle. Generally, their only rewards, if they have had any, have been those of social ostracism, unemployment, imprisonment, torture or exile; and often all of them. Their status as "leader" has been neither bought nor seized; it has been earned through self-sacrifice in a cause which offers no immediate personal reward, and little prospect even of possible reward in the future.

In these conditions, socialist leaders everywhere - particularly Communist leaders - have earned a reputation for selflessness and incorruptibility in the period when they neither hold power nor stand on the threshold of power. Which brings me to one aspect of that crucial question : WHY? Why the contrast between incorruptibility and self-sacrifice when out of power, and widespread corruption in power? (Throughout this article, I use the word "corrupt" in its dictionary sense - that is: "to infect, debase, pervert or defile" - and not in the way it is commonly used today to indicate financial wrong-doing only.) What is the ingredient of power which proves capable of corrupting the most incorruptible of people?

Corruption and Capitalism

This is not a question to be asked of the socialist world alone. On the contrary. The corruption which power induces in the power-holders is visible in all societies - capitalist and socialist, developed and under-developed, dependent and independent, imperial and colonial. The fact of corruption is not variable. What varies from social system to social system is apparently not the existence but the nature of the corruption.

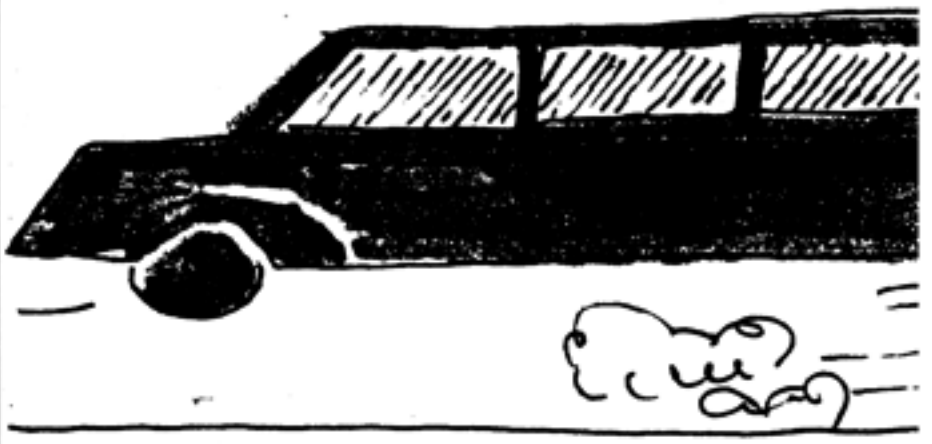
The characteristic corruption of capitalism, for example, is related understandably enough to money. The whole motivation of the capitalist system is the accumulation of private wealth by exploiting the labour of others. Status and privilege accrue to those who accumulate most. Personal enrichment with small regard to the interests of the rest of society is both acceptable and admired. Such a society is thus a hot-house for breeding a financial corruption, which seeps through the stock exchanges, the multi-national corporations, the political parties and the administration, into every centre of power.

In the highly developed centres of capitalism, only the tip of the corruption iceberg is revealed by the USA's billion dollar Savings and Loan scandal, or in Japan's Recruit Corporation, and Britain's Distillers Corporation. In politics, corruption surrounds all the CIA's involvement in drug-running and Oliver North's funding of the Iran Contra affair, as well as Britain's "privatisation" of the public property, and "sweeteners" for British Aerospace. In less developed capitalist societies, the absence of law and democracy encourages even more blatant and gross corruptions - the looting of the public purse by a Marcos or a Mobutu; the sponsoring of death squads by a Pinochet or a PW Botha; genocide of the indigenous forest peoples to free the land for profit-making in Brazil; and so on.

Ethics of the System

Socialism is different. Its motivation is the general advancement of the whole population - not individual enrichment. This creates a different but not necessarily corruption-free environment. It produces a climate hostile to the accumulation of vast private funds, and one which provides neither status nor power in reward for personal wealth. The means by which status and power are achieved are not necessarily corruption-free. But the corruption is seldom driven by a pursuit of personal riches. Its drive is generally a desire, often well intentioned, to impose on society what is deemed to be "the public good" or "the good of the state" - even when society as a whole does not recognise it as such. Whatever the form of the corrupt practice, whatever its consequences, its ostensible motivation is to advance the public interest and "state security", not to protect or amass private property.

Socialism's moral and ethical codes are



based on the concept that acceptable personal advance depends on the general advance of the whole society; that the individual rises with society as a whole, not from it. It is this code which provides the motivation for socialist leaders before they attain to power in the state. It explains why they willingly follow a life of personal hardship and privation; why they pass up a lifestyle of ease and comfort in order to devote themselves to winning the advance of the group - be it party or nation.

Why should all this change when socialists finally achieve power? There is now more than enough evidence that it does - if not in every case, at least more often than not. It is as though there are two stages in their history - BP, Before Power; and AP, After Power. BP is a period of incorruptibility; AP of corruptibility, and often of corruption. The process of transition from BP to AP is apparently subtle, and happens almost imperceptibly over time. But why? Is it an inevitable process? Or is it like a wasting disease which attacks only those with already infected standards whose symptoms have not previously been visible? Whatever it is, the evidence from the

socialist coutries shows that the transition certainly does happen, not to everyone in the seats of power, but to many enough to constitute a case requiring treatment.

It requires a tremendously detailed knowledge of life and conditions in the socialist countries to explain the phenomenon on the basis of their experience. I make no claim to such knowledge. Instead, in an attempt to explore the question Why? and How? I want to draw on factors which can be seen in embryo in our own South African liberation movement, and in various of its component bodies. None of these bodies yet exercise power in the state, but there are obvious indications that they may well do so in the near future. Our movements and leaders operate therefore with prospects of power before us. And those prospects begin to influence our own practices.

This is not to suggest that because power is now in sight, we are discarding the moral standards of past years of struggle. Corroding corruption has not become part of our style. But the subtle process by which the fore-taste of power corrupts seems to be creeping up on us unnoticed. We ignore the warning signals at our peril. Unless we can identify and eliminate the factors which have corrupted good honest leaders and organisations elesewhere, we could well repeat the experience of their decline and fall.

For a detailed analysis of the Eastern European process in which once honest men and women declined and fell, one must turn to their history. But in our own case we do not yet have any such history. We are only at the beginning - perhaps the birth pangs - of the process. Since we are in a BP (Before Power) position, we have to attempt to see where we are heading by using the historical experience of others. We have to rely on imagination because we have no After Power (AP) history of our own.

A Man of the People

Let me combine my own observations of what is actually happening in our movement with my imagination, in order to present the story of "A Man Called Uncle". He is an honest, incorruptible and widely respected veteran of our struggle. Though he looks older, he is only middle aged. He

has not had an easy life. All the drive and energy of his life has been given to the cause of liberation. His single-minded service to our peoples' struggle has brought him almost universal respect. He has become accepted by the people as one of their real leaders. They show admiration and respect for him in the courtesy title "Uncle".

Uncle has lived all his life on a simple scale. From the struggle he has received few material rewards. Only his constant political activity distinguishes his way of life from that of his working neighbours. He is probably the best known man in the district. He has been frequently seen on platforms, in marches and assemblies. People have heard him speak in public. They know what he stands for. They feel familiar with him and his character, even though they may never have exchanged words. He is known as honest and serious. He has become "our leader" without ever seeking to be so. For him, leadership is not a privilege or even a reward for his past. He sees it as an extra duty which others do not have.

The revolutionary change he has worked for all his life is coming close. Change is inthe air. The leaders are in great demand, to meet foreign diplomats, local dignitaries from the "other side", delegations offering aid. Many of these duties fall to Uncle. He is told by his comrades that for such occasions his usual jacket and pants won't quite do. He will be the odd man out amongst all the blue suits. The others will not take him or our movement seriously. Uncle of course has a dark suit. It has served him for weddings and funerals for years. It is getting shiny and the cuffs are beginning to fray. Will it be good enough for the occasion? His colleagues think not. A new suit, smart shirt and tie are provided. Rigged out like this, he is persuaded, he will properly represent a movement which will soon be part of government.

Formal meetings become very frequent. Uncle gets used to wearing his formal outfit every day. He feels quite at ease in it. Hasn't it always been the movement's aim to raise everyone's standard of life so that all can dress and live well? Imperceptibly a narrow gap begins to open up between him and his neighbours. They become slightly guarded in their relations with him, more deferential. They no longer exchange banter with him in the street. They begin to see him as "a big man", and they keep their distance unless he makes the first move.

Uncle drives an old Ford. His colleagues tell him it demeans our movement when he takes it to important functions where everyone else arrives in a shiny black limousine with chauffeur. In any case, his Ford is subject to breakdowns. He may miss an appointment, or arrive late with grease on his hands. The old Ford will not do. He is allocated an official car - almost new, with a trusted comrade as driver (our movement doesn't approve of calling him a "chauffeur") - to arrange parking and car maintenance. Uncle no longer travels by train or bus. He leaves home by car and returns by car. He no longer has time to walk around the neighbourhood just for exercise. Opportunities for casual street encounters with the neighbours wither away.

The burdens of power

Political change is close. There is ferment in the country and confrontation between rival factions is fierce. There are brawls and assaults at every political event. Prominent revolutionaries are under threat from wild men among their opponents, and perhaps even from assassins hired by the threatened regime. Our movement

decides that, whether they want them or not, leaders must have body-guards. Uncle believes he is safe amongst the people without any body-guard. He dislikes going everywhere with a silent shadow, even though the shadow is a trusty comrade. But Uncle is a disciplined member. He obeys the movement's rules.

Occasional off-duty strolls amongst his neighbours are no longer possible. Even at political meetings he can seldom talk freely and off-the-record to any of his comrades. He is shepherded by his bodyguard from his car, escorted through the audience to the platform. When the meeting ends, there is no hanging about: "bad security". It is back to his car, and away. This is not the way Uncle would like it. But hisbodyguard has his orders from "Security". The whole procedure has been decided "at a higher level". Uncle learns to accept his condition of isolation as another "sacrifice for the cause".

There are other things happening to him, which he cannot stop or change. Outside his own home people no longer address him as "Uncle" but as "Comrade Secretary of Information" - as though he has stopped being a person and has become an institution. Our movement has finally moved into the offices of state power. Uncle has become a Minister, and even the term "Comrade" has begun to disappear. He is now addressed solely as "Minister", or - even more to his distaste - as "The Honourable Minister". He has been given - no one knows by whom - a rank in the order of public importance. He has to learn, reluctantly, to occupy the slot determined for him by "Protocol". He must only walk, talk or be photographed in public after the Minister of Defence, and before the Minister of Justice.

The Protocols of Power

"Protocol" and "Security" are taking charge of his life. Once these two words referred to rules for behaviour. Now they have come to mean whole organisations of faceless people, who make rules in private, and account to nobody except their own Minister. Their decisions have acquired the force of laws. Uncle resents it, but Ministers, like all other loyal comrades, must abide by the decisions of the movement and government. "Protocol" provides a large suburban house suitable for diplomatic entertaining, and insists that Uncle moves to it. His only neighbours in the secure "Diplomatic Zone" are Ministers, foreign diplomats and senior officials. "Protocol" demands that Auntie too acquires a new, fashionable wardrobe. She must not continually appear in the same dress. "Security" provides two motor-bike outriders to accompany his black limousine everywhere - without consulting him. "Security" later equips their bikes with sirens, and "Protocol" arranges for a state decree to warn all road-users to draw to the side and stop when the sirens sound.

"Protocol" stocks his house with exotic drinks and delicate foods. Uncle has been satisfied with his usual home fare, but has been firmly told that this will not do. French wine and smoked salmon for "entertainment" purposes are deemed by "Protocol" to go with his Ministerial functions. No one knows why, but it is said that without them our government will be dismissed like an unimportant poor relation in the diplomatic world. It has to be admitted that Uncle enjoys the fine food and fine wine. But he is determined not to let them seduce him from his real aim, which is to represent the ordinary people.

His trouble is, he no longer meets ordinary people. He meets only other officials,

or diplomats and business-men wanting special favours from the government. He sees ordinary people from the windows of his car, and from the platforms of public meetings. But he no longer hears what they say or think or want. Now that he no longer takes neighbourhood strolls or lunch-hours in the the works canteen, he can learn about the people only from newspapers - when he has time to read them - and from reports put on his desk by his personal secretaries and aides. Uncle is careful to insist that they tell him all the facts - no cover-ups, no sugar coatings. He believes they do.

Men for all seasons

The aides are younger than the men of Uncle's generation. A few could be called "veterans of the struggle". But the majority have been selected by "Personnel" because they are bright, well educated, and specially trained for their posts. Most of them were formerly activists in the movement, and they all support the new government. But their outlooks on affairs are not always quite the same as Uncle's which were formed in a different age. Theirs were formed when power was close at hand. Few of them are motivated like Uncle by a selfless idealism. They have careers to consider. Their work is "for the cause", but it is also a career.

The longer they stay in their posts, the less they think of themselves as "comrades". They begin to think of themselves as "career diplomats" or "career civil servants". Their promotion no longer depends, as it once did, on their standing in the movement or their contribution to the struggle. It now depends on issues in the corridors of power - on the loyalty they display to those above them in the hierarchy, and on the smooth efficiency of their own departmental work. They need to keep on the right side of the people of power and influence. They develop a style of work suited to a regular civil-service career, where it is better to do nothing than to make a mistake. Their position makes them cautious. They are not innovators or originators. Publicly they must be seen to toe the official line, and where they are not prepared to do so, they can only resign from their jobs, or conspire secretly in order not to lose the confidence of the Prime Minister and the Party leadership.

Things are not going well for the new government. The opposition has reorganised, and is obstructing the new government's policies. There are even rumours of sabotage. Foreign investors are withdrawing. Prices are rising and jobs are being lost. The servants of state want to combat discontent and bolster the government. They want to show the world that things are not as bad as the gossip suggests. They have the best of intentions - to encourage investors, improve the morale of the government's supporters, and dismay its opponents. Gradually they develop the habit of hiding the bad news, or "massaging the statistics" to make things look better than they really are. Only the good news must be allowed to get out.

They dare not tell Uncle what they are doing. It is, they convince themselves, only for his own good, and the good of the cause. With his well known standards of strict honesty and openness, he would probably veto their actions. He is one of the old generation, they tell themselves. He has grown tired and inflexible. He doesn't really understand the "new realities". For the good of the country, they are convinced they must be "economical with the truth", even in their reporting to Uncle.

Conditions in the country get worse.

The leaders are all, like Uncle, cut off from the people. They no longer know what is really happening or how the ordinary citizens see things. Their assistants give them figures which show production rising, targets being met, welfare services expanding. Occasionally something comes to their attention which makes them wonder. But they have no reason to disbelieve the reports and no way to check for themselves. Uncle decides to take a "walk-about" in the city to see for himself. His decision is vetoed by "Security". He decides to inspect an important factory where there are hundreds of workers. "Security" cleans it up beforehand, repaints it, and advises the workforce in advance what Uncle would like to be told. When he passes through the streets on official occasions, "Security" lines the route with cheering school-children,and with adults who co-operate because it means a day off work on full pay. And anyway, they really like and respect Uncle.

End in Crisis

A process which no one has planned has taken charge of events. It seems to be happening like a machine with no one in charge. Everything is being changed, without any apparent decision. Uncle is being changed. He is no longer deciding his own course of action or following his own policies to carry out changes in society. He has become a man manipulated by forces outside of his will and beyond his control. Somehow his good intentions and his personal integrity have not been enough. Things have worked out in a way he never intended or expected.

There are three essential features of this allegory. They need to be borne in mind in order if it is to shed any light on our own times. First, that the leader has remained honest and well- intentioned throughout, without any selfish ambitions. Second, that the creeping corruption has not been of his own making. The conditons for it have been created by those around him. Third, that all concerned have acted in what they genuinely believed to be the best interests of the people and the state.

Corruption has not been the result of any flaws in Uncle's character. It has not been deliberately advanced by corrupt people with anti-social motives or secret personal aims. It has crept up almost unnoticed, through the good intentions of basically good people. It has developed in an an atmosphere where everything has been concentrated on immediate short-term expedients, and no attention has been paid to long-term consequences and end results.

This is the point of the Uncle story. It is an imaginary story. But it has been fashioned out of actual case-histories of real lives and real political developments in various places in Eastern Europe. But every single episode in the story - up to the point of Uncle's entry into an office of state - could equally well be based on what is actually happening in the South African liberation movement today. What power does to Uncle in the story is precisely what I see prospects of power starting to do to our movement and our leaders now.

Towards the Future

We have no reason to believe that the Eastern Europe AP experience, first of crisis and then of fall, cannot possibly happen to our movement in due course when it reaches the seats of power. If Uncle's story comes from our own experience, how would the story be likely to continue in the coming period? Again, we can learn from Eastern Europe, which can provide several different story lines. They differ in their

detail. But history shows that they all end in much the same place. Take this for example:

The opposition to the government grows stronger and more active. Some people are said by "Security" to be planning a coup or uprising. The Security chiefs might be right, or they may be exaggerating the danger. They may just be building up a case for demanding a larger departmental budget and wider powers. Who knows? Who, even in the government, can any longer distinguish between what is being alleged by officials and what is actually happening in the country? Dare any Minister oppose the Security Department's demand for a State of Emergency? Detentions without trial? Suppression of opposition parties or newspapers? Should public meetings be prohibited and new elections postponed indefinitely? Should strikes be made illegal to protect the supplies of food and power?

The Ministers are not reckless men. They know the whole future of the country depends on their decision. If they could trust their own instincts against the whole weight of "Security's" assessment, they might turn down the demand for emergency powers. But if their judgment should be wrong, all will end in disaster. They decide to be safe rather than sorry. Reluctantly they decide to accept special security measures. Democracy is buried, and replaced with rule by emergency decree. This marks the end of all the high idealism with which the people's government set out.

There are of course many other possible story lines. But the end tends always to be the same. My story is not either totally factual or totally fictional. It is not the story of a particular country or a particular party. But I believe it is a fair example of the real tragic story of socialism's decline and fall almost everywhere in Eastern Europe. It contains within it the kernel, perhaps the most important element in that decline. That kernel is the separation of the leaders from the people, which can come with power. That separation lays open even the most honest and dedicated comrade to irresistible pressures in high office. It explains, in part at least, what they do - and what they fail to do.

Whose is the fault?

In our story, there could be many unknowns. Was Uncle perhaps aware all along of what was happening? Did he just grow too old to understand or to care? Was he honestly convinced that the information his aides fed him was true? Did he honestly believe that a diet of good news and a display of confidence - true or false - was the only way to ensure the survival of the people's government?

One can fill in whatever answers one chooses: that he must have known things were going wrong, but was unwilling to risk his office, his reputation or his safety by saying so. That he came to value the comfort and security of a Minister's way of life more than his personal moral code. Or that he genuinely believed that preserving the people's government must be for the public good, and anything done to that end was therefore morally right. It is also possible to argue that, in reality, the debased standards of all around him finally debased the character of Uncle too. Whatever explanation one chooses, the simple truth cannot be altered. He helped to bring the new society into disrepute and ultimate collapse. Honest Uncle, incorruptible Uncle has been corrupted in power, and corrupted by power.

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I suppose in everyday speech, people

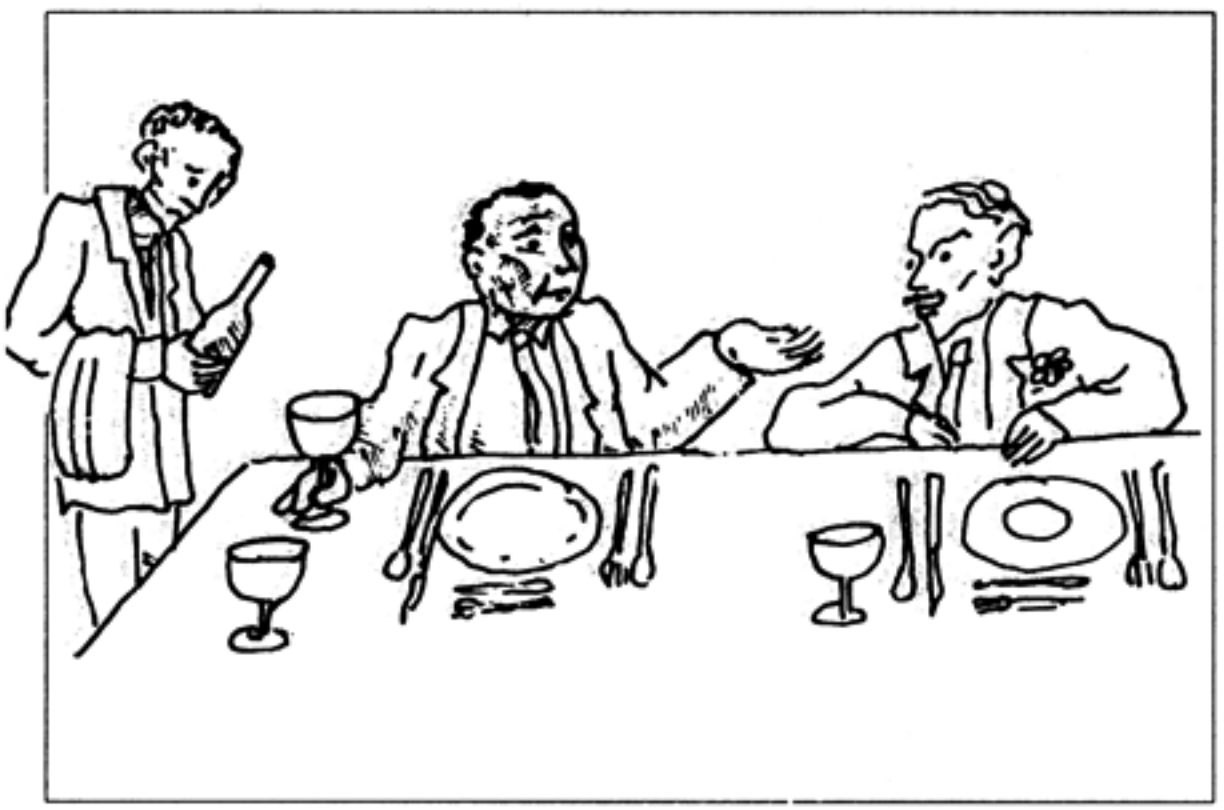
would say of Uncle that "power went to his head", as though it were something like a hat to be put on or taken off at will. But power is not so simple, or simply taken on and simply discarded.

Power in politics is not just the exercise of command. It is also a discipline imposed - or perhaps imposing itself - on the individuals who wield it. That discipline extends to include their way of living, thinking and working, and their rites of behaviour, conduct and deportment. Political power prescribes what is acceptable in dress, talk, diet and life style in high places. The codes are upheld by tradition and by custom. They are backed by the threat of isolation or of sanctions against transgressors. They are policed by the fraternity of power-holders who separate themselves from the rest of society in much the manner of an army or police force.

The behavioural codes of power are passed on from generation to generation. They are an inheritance from the past, mainly from the pomp and pageantry of feudalism. They were set in place for a precise purpose: to demonstrate clearly who ruled society, and who did not - where there was power, and where the obligation to obey. The status of kings and courtiers with power was publicly proclaimed through sometimes magical, sometimes threatening or myth-laden symbols like crowns, orbs, sceptres. Always behind the symbols there lurked the back-up instruments of power, the armed and uniformed troops. The more deeply state power entrenched itself, the more the trappings of that power extended. They came to include ceremonial troops and ceremonial transport, special palaces of power with special palace guards, special rituals for how the rulers were to be addressed and special attendants with special privileges of approach, and so on.

But the most important trappings in our time are those which unite all who have some share of power, against all those who do not. Special priviliges reserved for the power-holders weld them into a fraternity. Special barriers erected by the fraternity prevent outsiders from slipping in and claiming a share of power. These special privileges and special barriers make up what I refer to as "the trappings" of power.

Power today is inseparable from its trappings. It is the trappings which keep the policy makers separate from the people, and the leaders from the led. It is the trappings which maintain the whole edifice of special privileges and special life-styles which surrounds all those who share in political power. These trappings, however archaic and incongruous they may appear, are not just quaint rel-



ics of history. They are as essential to the upholding of power as foundations are to a house. They underpin existing power relations and insulate them from forces of change. The trappings are there to maintain the status quo.

Our own political programme, the Freedom Charter, illustrates our belief that the ending of white supremacy in South Africa requires the total overturn of the status quo. Our cause cannot be served by maintaining any part of that status quo - least of all the existing apparatus of state. Since the trappings of state power serve to uphold the status quo, the trappings of protocol and privilege which surround apartheid power must be essentially hostile to our cause. They are incompatible with our aim of transforming society to ensure equal rights for all, and contradict the democratic spirit of our programme.

I do not wish to suggest that the only cause, or even the most important cause of failure in Uncle's allegorical government or in Eastern European socialism should be ascribed to the trappings of power with which they were encumbered. But the case histories nevertheless provide much evidence for the conclusion that the existing trappings of power are incompatible with the social transformation of society. In Eastern Europe, attempts were made to take over the trappings of capitalist power, complete with all their diplomatic usages and privileges, and use them to serve the cause of socialist power. The results have been too disastrous for us to ignore.

The disaster should have been predictable. Socialist theory has always noted that the transition from capitalism to socialism cannot be made by transforming the economy alone. It has always stressed that it is equally necessary to change the whole superstructure of the system. Eastern European socialists generally followed that teaching. They made sweeping changes on a wide canvas - some critics say too wide. They changed institutions and customs of all kinds - parliaments, adminstrations, armies, factory managements, schooling, religion, social relations. They acted in the conviction that all former social institutions had to be changed if they were to serve the building of socialism.

But surprisingly not in respect of the trappings of power and its diplomatic modalities. These were simply left unchanged. Whether this was because they were simply overlooked, or whether because they were given a low priority until they were too well established to be altered, or whether they were deliberately preserved is unclear. Whatever the reason, the fact is that the trappings were not changed. Instead - like Uncle's comrades - they kept the old trappings, worked within them, and were undermined by them. They may well now see some need to re-examine their practices in this matter, as we made need to examine ours.

We dare not wait until our leaders occupy the seats of power before we find alternative ways. We have the opportunity now to debate and reach consensus about alternative modes of behaviour and conduct which would be suitable for our own leaders in high places. Such alternatives might well offend against the existing behavioural codes of the hide-bound ranks of today's great and powerful. No matter. The offence given by such alternatives is less important than our need for new ways which will be appropriate to a new society based on social justice and equal rights. And inimical to corruption in high places.

A public campaign by our movement, against the entrenched trappings of power, would probably be the world's first. That

should not deter us. We have shown the world something new before now, as for example in the building of an enduring alliance of the Communist Party and National Movement with a unified armed force. We can perhaps do so again.

This may sound unduly presumptuous. We are a fairly small movement from a relatively small country. But we have advantages which those who reached power in earlier times did not.

We can benefit now from the examples of those who have not tackled the problem, in Eastern Europe, and in newly independent Africa. Their experiences demonstrate the corrupting consequences of simply taking the trappings of capitalist power over into a new social order.

Thus we have the chance to seal off in advance the Corridors to Corruption, where others tried and failed. Or simply never tried at all.

It is a challenge which calls for our utmost seriousness. It demands that we debate the matter openly, without personalities, recriminations or personal ambitions. It demands also that we measure ourselves against the standards of honesty, incorruptibility and dedication which we expect - and generally get - from our leaders; and that we understand the pressures they will be subject to if we cannot find the right answers.

The task is nothing less than setting the world of liberation and of socialism on a new path, where dreams of power without the corrupting restraints of the old order can be made real. Real people's power! ★

...In their own words

• "PROTECT DEMOCRACY FROM THE MASSES" - JUDGE OLIVIER

In the old days white racists justified their monopoly on parliament on the grounds that blacks were "too uncivilised" to vote. But, now, in the era FW De Klerk's New South Africa, these kinds of explanations are a little too crude. After all, racism is dead. So how do you still justify keeping the masses down?

Judge Pierre Olivier, vice-chairman of the South African Law Commission, and the man who is going to produce De Klerk's Bill of Rights, has come to the rescue:

"Democracy can never merely be associated with the will of the masses, the lowest common factor on the intellectual or moral level", the good judge told this year's opening ceremony at the University of the Orange Free State.

"When I plead for democracy and place a high and even non- negotiable premium on it, then I am not referring to that worn-out form of unshaded majority government which unjustly masquerades as democracy."

"Unshaded majority government"? Judge Olivier has given the game away. They want to take colour out of South African politics ... and put the shades back in.

• THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL QUESTION

Within the SACP and the broader liberation movement there has been a lively debate on the national question. It is a debate that has endured over the decades. Is South Africa a nation, or only a nation-in-the-making? Is South Africa one or two nations? How does one apply (often competing) Marxist theories of the nation to the South African situation?

The leader of the Conservative Party has produced his own definition - "We say: this is not a nation. It is a stew of peoples with explosives" - Dr Andries Treunricht.

Corn in a court of chickens

Poems by Dikobe Martins

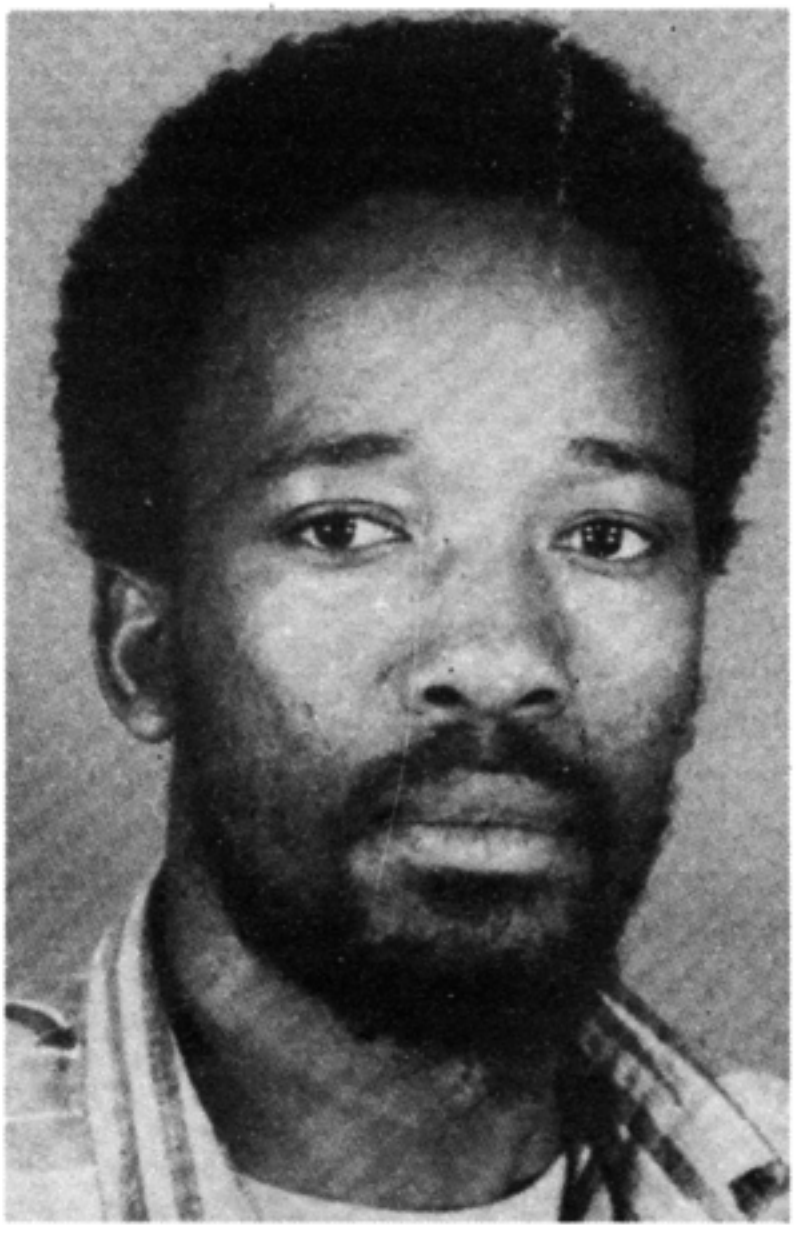
Ben Dikobe Martins is an irrepressible artist. If he was stranded alone on a three by three desert island he'd somehow transform the place into a statue, or a poem, or a poster in a matter of hours.

Dikobe has recently been released from prison. He has smuggled out with him an amazing number of poems, paintings, photographs, and even a tape cassette of poetry he performed in his cell. Interwoven with the recorded poetry are the revolutionary songs of his comrades, going round and round (you can hear it in stereo), toyi-toying in a tight little Diepkloof exercise yard.

How did he manage to do all of this under the noses of the warders? And how did he manage to smuggle it out? Dikobe just gives a wry smile.

Born in Alexandra township in 1956, Dikobe was brought up by his mother, a factory worker. He was sent to boarding school in Aliwal North, and then matriculated at Coronationville High School.

"My time at Coronationville was interesting. This was 1972 to 73, it was the period of Black Consciousness. We identified with the Black Power movement in the US, and related it to our own oppression. There was lots of literature around. We read Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, and Malcom X's writings. There was one student, Charlie, who had a book he wanted us to discuss, *Das Kapital*. I remember asking this chap: `What does it say about apartheid?' `No, it speaks about class which is more embracing than black and white', he replied.



Dikobe Martins

"I remember, we were very dismissive of this!"

After matriculating, Dikobe went to the Rand College of Education to train as a teacher. He didn't last long. He was central

to a major student struggle against the racist rector. "We successfully got rid of the rector - but four of us were expelled. That was the last of my endeavours to be a teacher."

"I spent most of 1975 doing art work, at this time I was working in Bill Ainslie's studio. I started having exhibitions." Inspired by the events of 1976, Dikobe wrote his first poetry manuscript. But he was forced to go on the run, and the manuscript was lost, never to be recovered.

Between 1977 until the time of his arrest in 1983 Dikobe was based in Pietermaritzburg. He was involved in community work, and typically always wove his cultural interests into these projects.

At the time, Dikobe was one of the early pioneers in what has become a significant artistic form in our country - struggle T-shirts. "Robin Holmes and I produced a Steve Biko T-shirt. It was banned. But we continued producing it. We were charged but acquitted, because the banned version had Biko facing right. After the banning we simply reversed the design and had Biko facing left!"

During his time in Pietermaritzburg, Dikobe helped launch the DCO Matiwane Youth League. The organisation was politically and, predictably, also culturally very active.

"We had a poetry unit, and a drama unit, and regular political discussions. We met 3 or 4 times a week. When there were MK sabotage attacks against apartheid targets in Maritzburg, the youth comrades would say - 'There are some really serious MK comrades around, not like us, just discussing the Freedom Charter, and The Communist Manifesto.'"

Unknown to the youth, Dikobe was one of these "really serious MK comrades". Dikobe was active in an MK unit that carried out a number of successful operations, including hitting the Supreme Court on two separate occasions. He was eventually arrested late in 1983, and sentenced to 10 years.

In 1984, just after his sentence, Dikobe's first published collection of poems, *Into the Whirlwind* (Ad Donker) appeared. Dikobe was released from prison late in 1990, and is now working full-time for the SACP in our Natal Midlands office.

Here are two prison poems from a collection that will be published shortly by Ad Donker. ★

keepers of the law

the judge
is dressed
in red and white

the assessors
in black and white

the prosecutor
in a hostage smile

and i
in the borrowed robes
of my grandmother's wisdom

corn she said
cannot expect justice
from a court
composed of chickens...

there are many ways

(after e. brock)

there are many cumbersome ways
to kill a man:

you can shackle him
hand and foot
and bring him in chains
from the bowels of a dungeon
to a supreme court and charge him
    to do this properly you require
    a ruling class
    a cock that crows "rise in court!"
    a cloak of secrecy to dissect
    a sponge
    some vinegar
    and one man
    to hammer
    the charges home

or you can simply
make him carry a plank
to the top of a hill
and nail him to it

or if you are not too fussy
you can take a length of electric cord
and generate darkness -
by shaking him senseless
    but for this you need
    sound proof interrogation rooms
    electrodes
    blindfolds
    sockets
    plugs
    the protection of the internal
    security act
    or the protection of the state of
    emergency
    and buckets of warm water
    to wash away
    stubborn stains of blood

or better still
dispensing with the tokyo declaration
you may if his asthma allows
spray teargas at him
as if you were spraypainting a car
    but then you need
    closed windows
    iron tipped boots
    a plague of rats, sell-outs and liars
    blankets crawling with lice
    a dozen songs of scorn and ridicule
    a magistrate
    a blind district-surgeon
    and a deaf-mute-and-blind
    inspector of detainees

well
in an age of skyscrapers
you may dispose of him
by opening a window
for fresh air
    all you then require
    is a colour or ideology
    to separate you
    and several arms factories
    and grave yards

these are
as i began
cumbersome ways
to kill a man
    simpler
    direct
    and much more neat
    is to see that he is living
    somewhere in the middle
    of the festering sore
    of poverty
        exhausted by hunger
        and dehydrated by thirst

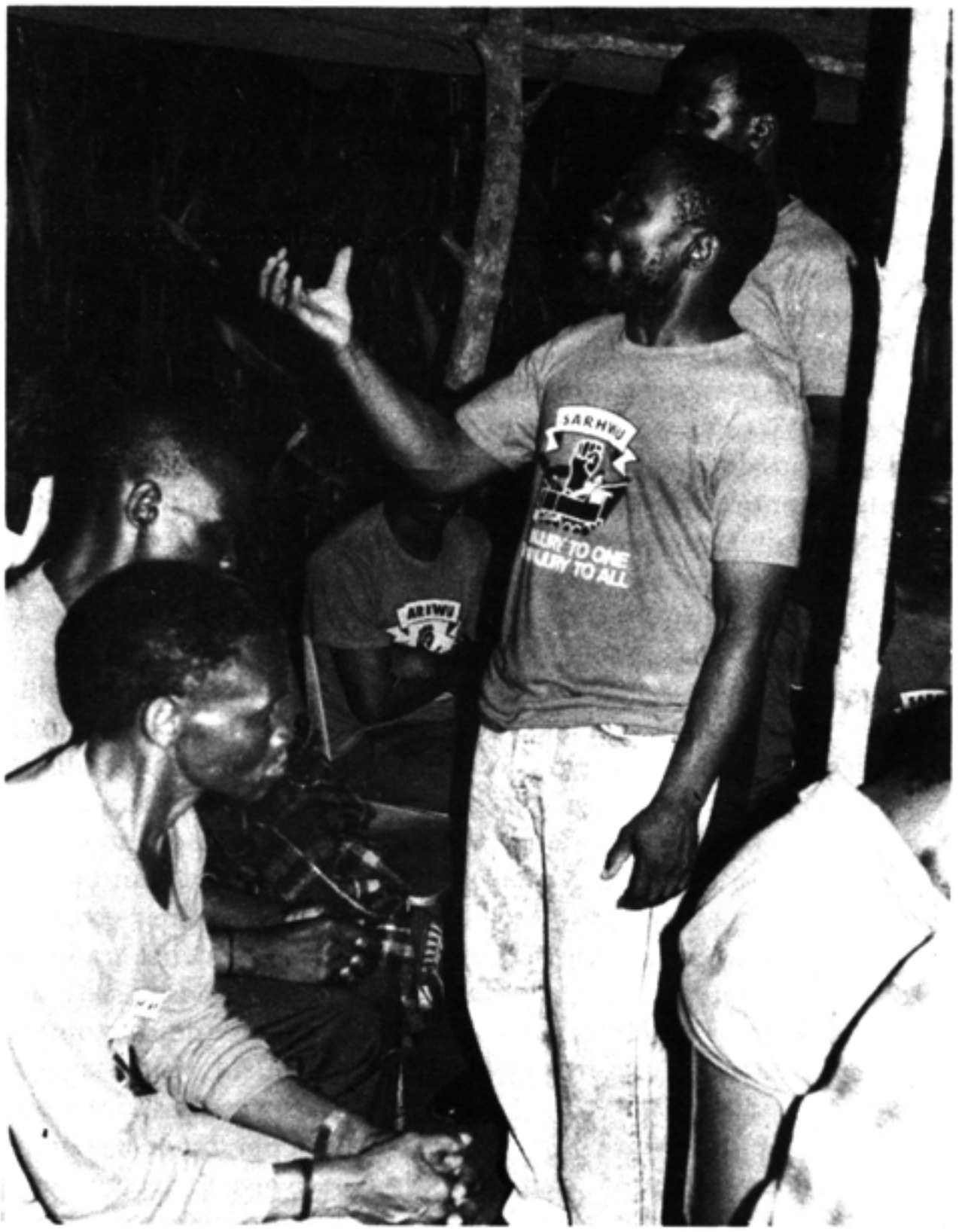
like i said
there are many ways
to kill a man ...

The worker photographer

William Matlala is a photographer with COSATU. "I started full-time photography in 1989. But before that I was a worker at Trimpak in Germiston. I was a FAWU member and shopsteward."
His interest in photography goes back more than ten years. "I started taking photos in 1979. But it was not easy. Cameras are very expensive. Then there is the basic problem of having no leisure time as a worker. We were often forced to work overtime, from Sunday to Sunday. For a worker, any hobby is difficult because of the job."
The African Communist asked William Matlala to tell us about two of his photographs.

A ONE-WEEK OLD BABY, AND SUDDENLY YOU DON'T HAVE A JOB OR ANYWHERE TO LIVE

"I took this photo in 1989 in the South African Domestic Workers' Union regional office. This woman had been working for the same white madam for about 6 years. When she became pregnant and was close to the birth she said to the madam, `Now my days are too close. Let me find a temporary replacement and go back home to the countryside to have my baby. I'll be back after one month.'
"`Oh, no. Don't worry', said the madam.`I'll help you. Have the baby here.'
"Within one week of the birth the white madam just changed her mind. This woman was dismissed with that one week baby, walking on the streets, nowhere to go."



DEATH OF A RAILWAY WORKER

"This is the early hours of the morning, somewhere in Venda. It is the wake for a SARHWU member. He had been murdered the previous week by vigilantes on Germiston station, during the big railway strike.

"The mourners in the photograph are thinking about the previous week. The deceased, their comrade, was coming with a large group of fellow strikers from the East Rand to a meeting at the union's regional offices in Germiston. As the train approached the station they could see armed vigilantes on the platform. They tried not to get off the train, but they were teargassed off by the police, and then hacked and chopped by the vigilantes.

"These mourners in the photograph have come from all over South Africa, not just from Venda, to bury their comrade in his home village.

"The man in the middle, I don't know his name. Look at him. I think he stands for all the strength in the face of suffering, the courage and humanness of our working class."

Iraq - the background

The recent US-led invasion of Kuwait and Iraq gave rise to fairly widespread sympathy for Saddam Hussein in our country. Saddam was seen as a Third World hero standing up against the imperialist bully-boys. Some people even drew comparisons with the heroic Vietnamese struggle. The spontaneous anti- imperialist feelings of our people are entirely positive and are born of their own daily experiences. But sympathy for Saddam Hussein with his own sub-imperialist ambitions in the Gulf region is another matter altogether.

The shaping of Iraq

British colonialism dominated the Gulf region in the second half of the 19th century. British domination deepened after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Although Iraq was under the Ottoman Empire, ruled by Turkey, by the beginning of the 20th century Iraqi trade was under British control. The country was flooded with imported textiles, destroying local Iraqi handicraft industries.

During the 1st World War (1914-18), British troops occupied Iraq and Syria. Britain made a secret deal with France to carve up the region between them. After the war an Arab nationalist movement emerged throughout the region. This prompted the British to adopt a form of indirect rule using Arab institutions while, as they admitted, "pulling the strings ourselves".

They wanted - in the words of Sir Arthur Hartzel head of the British India Office's political department who was advising on Arab affairs - "something that won't cost very much, which Labour can swallow consistent with its principles, but under which our economic and political interests will be secure."

In 1920 the League of Nations "awarded" Iraq to Britain as a mandated territory. Iraqi resentment of British rule and heavy taxation resulted in a popular revolt. It was ruthlessly crushed and nearly 9000 Arabs were killed. The British forces used gas shells "with excellent moral effect", and for 10 years waged a bombing campaign against Kurdish rebels in the oil-rich mountainous North-East.

Winston Churchill, Colonial Secretary at the time, urged the use of mustard gas in these raids. The suggestion was rejected on technical grounds, but the British Air Force machine-gunned villages and dropped delayed action bombs to stop the people tending their crops.

Iraq's first trade union was formed in 1929, and in 1931 there were widespread strikes and demonstrations against British control, rising taxes and the massive new concessions to the oil companies. Iraqi independence was finally conceded in 1932, to give the ruler Faisal ibn Hussain a freer hand to suppress popular unrest. But behind Faisal, the British still held supreme power.

The Iraqi army was equipped and trained by the British. It increasingly took on a political role, dominated by the reactionary, pro-British politician Nuri al-Said, who became the effective ruler of Iraq until the revolution of 1958. Under the Nuri al-Said regime all political parties were banned, the press was censored, and there were some 10,000 political prisoners. There was widespread torture of opponents, there

were police spies everywhere, and a complacent parliament was dominated by big landowners.

Until the 1950s there were no real political parties, apart from the underground Communist Party, founded in 1921. The 1952 Egyptian revolution, led by Nasser, forced the removal of British troops from Egypt. It had a huge impact on the Arab world, and gave a big impetus to national liberation movements.

In early 1957 a National Unity Front was formed by the three main opposition parties banned in 1954 - the Iraqi Communist Party, the National Democratic Party, and the Ba'ath Party together with the Nasserists.

It was a very loose alliance aiming at independence, social reform and land reform. It stimulated a progressive Free Officers movement in the army. In July 1958 an army coup killed the reactionary Nuri al-Said and established a new Iraqi republic ruled by a Revolutionary Council of top army officers, one of whom was Prime Minister Qasim.

SADDAM HUSSEIN

The revolution enjoyed great popularity as its policies met many of the demands of the national liberation struggle. Land reform broke the political power of the landlords. The link with Britain was cut, and Iraq was taken out of the US-inspired anti-communist Bagdad Pact.

The Communists were the most effective political party, and they enjoyed tremendous popularity because of their long, courageous fight for unity in the struggle for national democratic transformation. CIA director Allen Dulles described the Iraq situation at the time as "the most dangerous in the world today", claiming that the Communists were close to "a complete takeover".

But the new progressive government remained a basically bourgeois regime, relying upon strong left forces. The secret services of the imperialist powers (including those of the US and France) worked to undermine the revolution by exploiting potential divisions within the broad national front. When the enemies of the revolution, in their efforts to provoke disunity, made an unsuccessful attempt to kill Qasim, one of the would-be assassins was a youth Ba'athist called Saddam Hussein.

The assassination attempt was used by the right as a pretext to resume repression against Communists, trade unionists and students. Nuri al-Said's secret police were brought back into business. By 1963 the reactionaries were successful in their fascist coup, which put the Ba'athist Party in power and started wholescale slaughter of their political opponents.

The Ba'ath Party

Ba'athism, a trend in Arab nationalism from the late 1940s, has its basis in the ideas of authoritarianism and violence promoted by its founder, the French-educated Syrian, Michel Aflaq. Aflaq was influenced by European fascism.

Saddam (meaning "the one who confronts") Hussein was a hit-man for the Ba'athists from the 1950s. He was later promoted in the party by Aflaq's personal

intervention. As a petty bourgeois nationalist party, the Ba'ath had diverging trends among its leaders. Internal conflicts were often resolved by conspiratorial and bloody methods. These internal conflicts led to another army coup, followed in 1968 by yet another Ba'ath Party coup.

The Ba'athist right-wing, with Saddam Hussein in the leadership, set out to defeat any attempts at popular revolt and real democratic change. He was well aware of the mounting demand for democracy and the strength of the Communist Party and the Kurdish national movement. (The Kurdish people, about one quarter of the Iraqi population, were demanding autonomy). Without renouncing his anti-Communism and contempt for the Kurds, Saddam evolved a new policy, combining suppression of all opposition with moves to win popular support. Amid a relentless flow of demagogic propaganda, expressed via the Ba'ath control of the media, a new concept of "popular democracy" was plugged hard. In practice, it meant one-party rule backed by state-organised terror against all opponents.

Oil profits

The oil price rose dramatically in the first half of the 1970s. By 1975 Iraq was making 8000 million dollars a year from oil, nearly 16 times more than in 1972. This huge increase in oil revenues saw a rapid social transformation in Iraq, and the Ba'ath party more and more became the tool of a new parasitic section of the bourgeoisie.

In 1980 there were over 700 multi-millionaires in Iraq. Most of them were officials, members and supporters of the Ba'ath party and its "special-type socialism". Such fortunes could only have been made with the co-operation of top bureaucrats in charge of state expenditure. This type of co-operation was the driving force behind the expansion of a non-productive sector of the economy, which held back any real social and economic development.

Transnational companies, based in Japan, West Germany, France, Britain and the US, were able to secure large, highly profitable contracts from Iraq's dependence on the world capitalist market. The new parasitic alliance of entrepreneurs, middlemen and bureaucrats, with no interest in planned investment for economic stability, became the social base of the ruling Ba'ath party. At their head was a group of governors, senior officials and army officers with a common interest in political power and opportunities for enrichment. This group was vehemently opposed to any kind of democratic advance.

In the four years between 1975 and 1978 alone, over a thousand Kurds were executed, 240 villages burned down and 350,000 people deported from Kurdistan. With oil revenues rolling in, the ruling junta had unlimited funds both for repression and to bid for popularity by creating new jobs in public services and large construction projects. It was in this context that Saddam Hussein became state president by gangster methods. He removed competition, and promoted himself to the rank of field marshal despite his lack of military experience.

The Iranian revolution

The ruling Iraqi leadership, maintaining itself in power through the most brutal terror, was greatly alarmed by the February 1979 overthrow of the Shah of Iran. It was an example of thousands of unarmed people facing a powerful army and secret police, yet defeating the tyranny with amazing speed.

The sympathy of the Iraqi people with the Iranian popular revolution was seen as a potential threat to Ba'athist absolute control. Thousands of Iraqi families technically "of Iranian origin" were forcibly deported to Iran. At the same time Saddam welcomed into exile former officers of the Shah's army. They began to plan a surprise attack on the supposedly vulnerable Iran. A quick and spectacular victory, they hoped, would make Saddam virtually undisputed master of the Gulf, and effectively the most important leader in the Arab world.

The Iraqi invasion of Iran was launched in September 1980 on the pretext of Iran's "interference in the internal affairs of Iraq", and with the intention of "liberating" areas claimed by Iraq. The initial Iraqi attack, over a 900 kilometre front, was intended as an Israeli-type blitzkrieg. But it did not get far into Iran. From March 1981 the attack was pushed back on to the defensive due to poor leadership and over-stretching of resources. After the Iranian counter-offensive of May 1982, and as the war dragged on, most of the ground fighting was on the Iraqi side of the border.

Saddam was unable to arouse mass enthusiasm, even in the army, but he was given wide international support. Sudanese and Egyptian troops fought alongside the Iraqis, and France supplied them with advanced aircraft and Exocet missiles. Apartheid South Africa supplied its G5 and G6 long-range artillery. The Gulf states and Saudi Arabia loaned Saddam a billion dollars a month. The US made it clear that it would not permit any challenge to Western "vital interests" in the Gulf (meaning, a major Iraqi defeat).

After 8 years of bloodletting and mass destruction a UN- sponsored ceasefire was at last agreed between Iraq and Iran in August 1988. Half a million Iraqis had perished in this senseless and unsuccessful bid by Saddam Hussein and his ruling clique to emerge as the dominant Gulf and Arab power. The Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait last year was essentially another bid with the same objective.

The 20th century history of Iraq, as of all the Middle East, shows that if the region's millions of ordinary people are to find their own way to peaceful advance and social development there are two essential prerequisites - democracy at home, and the removal of the profit-seeking interests of Western imperialism from their daily lives.★

From around the world ...

What Communist Parties are saying

'We Portuguese communists do not share such an opinion...'

In the same year as our own 70th anniversary, on March 6th this year, the Portuguese Communist Party celebrated its 70th anniversary. The PCP remains one of the most powerful Communist Parties in Western Europe, and like the SACP it has experienced many decades in the underground. It emerged from clandestinity in the April 1974 democratic revolution which toppled the fascist dictatorship and paved the way for the independence of Portuguese colo-

nies in Africa.

The Party played a key role in the democratic revolution. Within one year of its legalisation, the PCP had built up a membership of over 100,000.

The following are extracts from PCP general secretary, Alvaro Cunhal's opening address to the Party's "Avante" festival late last year:

"Profound changes are taking place in the world situation. Tempestuous events and transformations express and create new realities. They do not, however, eliminate a fundamental trait of the 20th century : *a century of great social, political and cultural victories of the workers and peoples, of revolutionary transformations, which starting with the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, radically changed the map of societies in the world.*

"It is well to remember what many wish to wipe from our memory. Never in thousands of years of history had humanity embarked on an enterprise of such profound human meaning : to put an end to the exploitation of one person by another; to put an end to great social injustices, to build a new society. This enterprise resulted in transformations and victories of historic value and consequences in the land of the Soviets...

"A new revolutionary process treading unknown paths. A complex, irregular and uncertain process, suffering setbacks and defeats that no-one had foreseen. A process which at present faces great obstacles, difficulties, problems and dangers.

"But can the seriousness of the problems which arose or were revealed, the defeats of communist parties in power, the crises and the access to power of right-wing forces in socialist countries, be considered as representing `the end of communism', the end of the heroic and victorious struggle of generations and generations for a project to free humanity? Can one consider that this galvanising, revolutionary world process of the 20th century was all a utopia and a mistake?

"We, Portuguese communists, do not share such an opinion.

"According to our Party's analysis, such events and defeats are not due to mistaken or utopian communist ideals. They occurred because of a departure from and a violation of these ideals, in essential aspects concerning the exercise of power, democracy, economic organisation, party inner life and the ties to the masses, as well as in what concerns ideology, through its dogmatisation and imposition.

"On the other end, essential facts of the history of capitalism in this century should not be forgotten. Two world wars which caused nearly 50 million dead and destroyed entire countries; fascist dictatorships as bloody and cruel as those of Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Pinochet, and Salazar's dictatorship which we, Portuguese, cannot forget; aggressions, conspiracies, interventions, puppet regimes imposed on peoples and state terrorism.

"We oppose the hurried theorisation which seeks to whitewash capitalism, praising its achievements and overlooking its nature, its reality, its iniquity and its crimes.

"It is for us quite clear that *neither has imperialism lost its exploiting and aggressive nature, nor have socialism and communism ceased to be necessary, valid and credible projects, with no alternative up to the present, for the liberation of the workers and the peoples."*

'Many comrades are saying it is good to be a JCP member'

With nearly half a million members, the Japanese Communist Party is one of the largest Communist Parties in a capitalist country. Its membership has grown from 88,000 in 1961. The JCP has 30 elected representatives in the Japanese Diet (parliament), and 3,954 local assembly members. The JCP newspaper, *Akahata*, has a readership of 3 million - in fact 260,000 new *Akahata* members were signed on in a mass readership drive in the two months before the JCP's 19th Congress in July last year.

The JCP has for some time pursued a relatively independent line. It has been critical of both the Soviet and Chinese Communist Parties for, what it calls, their 'hegemonism' and 'great power chauvinism'. In his opening address to the 19th Congress, Kenji Miyamoto (chairman of the central committee), spoke on the crisis in Eastern Europe, and he outlined what he regarded as the most salient features of the JCP:

"The situation in Eastern Europe was brought about by the great-power chauvinism and hegemonist intrusion of the Stalin-Brezhnev model of a political and economic system, and by the ruling circles of the countries accepting it. These developments show the failure of the rule of great-power chauvinism. There is now, at the same time a tendency to negate and and abandon the positive aspects of the communist movements ...We must not now overlook the growing tendency to submit to the political strategy of imperialism and capitalism.

"The errors committed by the former ruling parties in Eastern European countries were so great that they one after another have changed their names. Some parties have amended and altered their programmes and statutes...These events show more clearly that our 30-year criticism of big power chauvinism is very significant...

"Let me refer to the question : What are the elements that make up the position of the party about which many comrades are saying, it is good to be a JCP member.

"First, the party puts forward and promotes the way to achieve a people's democratic revolution against imperialism and monopoly capital, as the task of the liberation struggle in a highly developed capitalist country, subordinated to the US.

"Second, the party has independently waged struggles against the oppression and intervention of US imperialism and the hegemonist interventions by China and the Soviet Union.

"Third, with the awareness that the JCP is the vanguard party of the first nation in human history to suffer the devastation of nuclear weapons, the party has been highly active in initiatives for the elimination of nuclear weapons and for world peace.

"Largely by maintaining these three points, the JCP has established its position as a pioneer." ★

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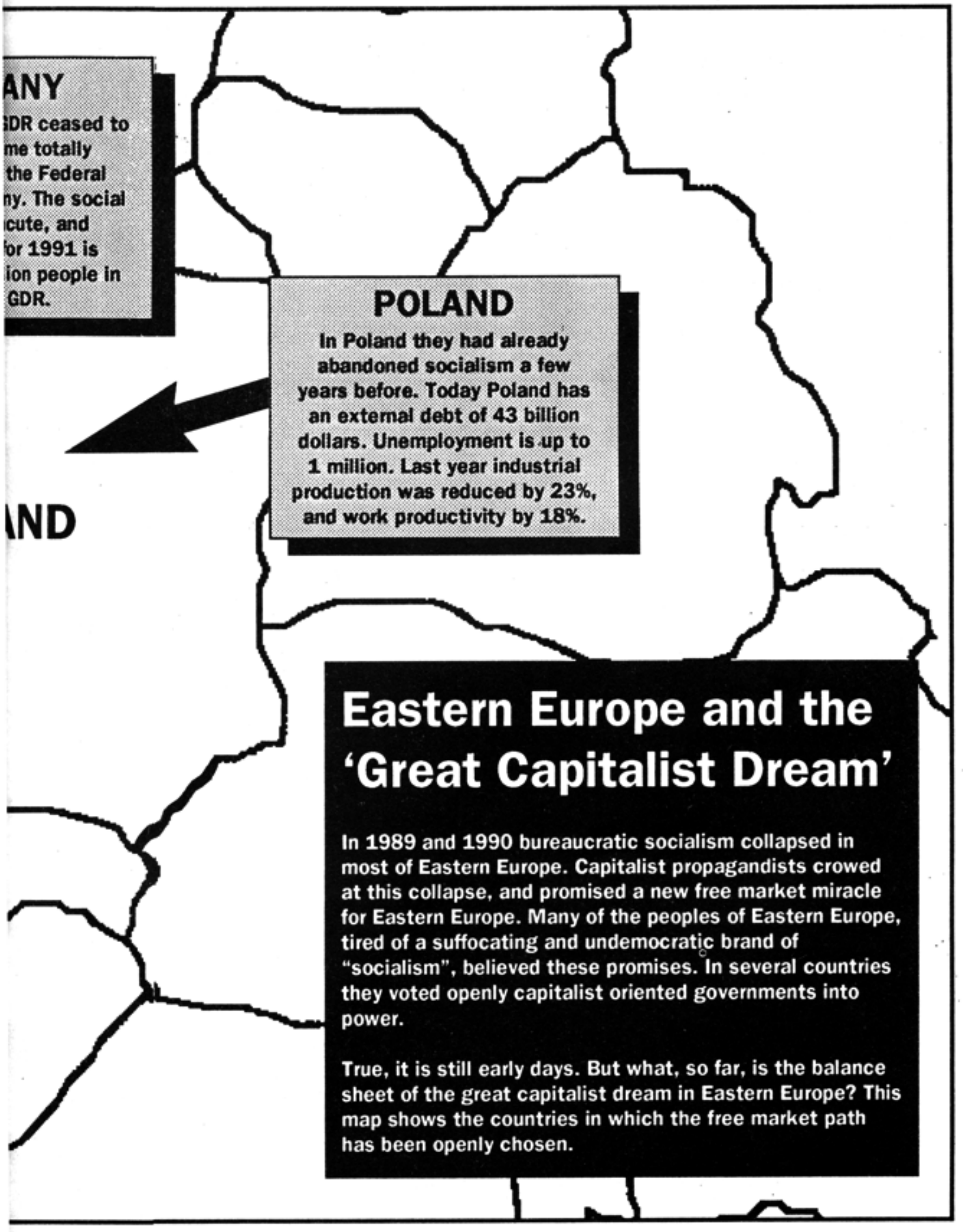
CZECHOSLOVAKIA
Since November 1989 there has been a rapid swing to bury socialism and surrender the country to the designs of world capitalism. Last year food prices climbed 50%. Predictions for this year are that unemployment will be up to one and half million. In the course of 1990 the newly elected president Vaclav Havel hastily packed himself off on a United States tour. He warmly praised the "American way of life". He received plenty of promises but no concrete assistance for his pains.
PO
CZECH-
OSLOVAKIA
HUNGARY
In March 26 1990 the Centre Right Hungarian party won the elections. Inflation has climbed to 30%. The foreign debt is 21 billion dollars. Prices of basic goods are up 127%. Unemployment has hit thousands of industrial workers, technicians, and professionals.
HUNGAR



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POLAND

In Poland they had already abandoned socialism a few years before. Today Poland has an external debt of 43 billion dollars. Unemployment is up to 1 million. Last year industrial production was reduced by 23%, and work productivity by 18%.

AND

Eastern Europe and the 'Great Capitalist Dream'

In 1989 and 1990 bureaucratic socialism collapsed in most of Eastern Europe. Capitalist propagandists crowed at this collapse, and promised a new free market miracle for Eastern Europe. Many of the peoples of Eastern Europe, tired of a suffocating and undemocratic brand of "socialism", believed these promises. In several countries they voted openly capitalist oriented governments into power.

True, it is still early days. But what, so far, is the balance sheet of the great capitalist dream in Eastern Europe? This map shows the countries in which the free market path has been openly chosen.

Winner takes all

Beyond the Casino Economy: Planning for the 1990s

By Nicholas Costello, Jonathan Michie and Seumas Milne (Verso, London, 1989)

The 1980s witnessed remarkable political changes in many parts of the world, most powerfully in the socialist states. These changes have been linked with fundamental and far reaching changes in the way economic strategies are viewed. Central planning, in terms of material balances with enterprises being state-owned and controlled by ministries, has been thrown into question. Socialist countries are now experimenting, to various degrees, with private ownership and markets.

At the same time, less developed countries which had always sought growth through state direction and regulation of prices have moved, under pressure, towards less restrictions on private capital and greater freedom for trading at market based prices. These shifts, and similar rightward turns in economic policies of advanced capitalist countries, have led to a widespread belief that socialism has failed.

The claim that socialism has failed has been fed and repeated continuously by right-wing politicians. And many phenomena can reinforce that conclusion in a superficial observer. The Soviet Union's rate of growth has slowed and was worsened by a severe shortage of consumer goods. The same was true of Poland and some other members of Comecon (CMEA). In China's case, economic reforms were initially followed by a dramatic improvement in living standards in the 1980s. Superficially the strong industrialisation of South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong has also led some to conclude that a capitalist route is superior to socialism for poor countries.

In this climate *Beyond The Casino Economy* is a rare book, for it presents a sustained and robust argument in favour of socialist economic policies. And instead of relying on old formulas or dogmatism, the authors base their socialist argument on a careful and thorough examination of the changes

that have recently taken place in capitalism. They convincingly demonstrate that modern capitalist growth contains its own contradictions which cannot be solved by private ownership and unregulated markets.

Nicholas Costello, Jonathan Michie and Seumas Milne take a wide perspective, but their main focus is on Britain. Although their book provides much food for thought for all of us, not least in South Africa, debating the future of socialist economic policies, it is especially aimed at analysing the failures of British capitalism.

For much of this century, British capitalism has failed to match the successful growth of the leading capitalist industrial economies. But the governments of Margaret Thatcher since 1979 claimed to have reshaped and revitalised the British economy by freeing market forces and privatising the state sector. This book's authors show that this claim is false. They demonstrate that the British economy continues to suffer from deep and unproductive contradictions which the policies of the 1980s have only partially disguised, not solved or harnessed. What has been constructed is merely a casino economy where enormous riches are gained by gambling on the stock exchange and on property prices.

Beyond The Casino Economy shows that, contrary to the right-wing's claims, the recent experience of Britain demonstrates the failure of "free enterprise" policies. These policies are not a model for the rest of the world to follow. The British economy would be much stronger if Margaret Thatcher and the preceding governments had followed socialist oriented policies based on *expanded* public ownership, nationalisation of the financial centres, and elements of *planning*. These policies would not have made Britain socialist but they would have brought benefits to the British people by giving a more solid, rationally organised basis to capitalist industry and trade, while ensuring that the benefits are shared.

Other authors have sometimes made similar arguments in a backward looking manner. They have sought (understandably) to protect employment in Britain's old industries - such as shipbuilding, textiles and steel whose decline was brought about by their owners' failure to match the foresight, investment and technological development of other countries. This book does examine the roots of these failures. But its main direction is forward looking.

Its central argument is based on a detailed study of the sector on which the modern economy depends - information technology. Can the information technology infrastructure be developed by private firms competing on the market or does it require state intervention and planning?

The authors show that modern information technology is a sector where telephone networks and computing have become inextricably linked. The right wing response in Britain has been to take the state-run telephone network, privatise it and open it up to market competition from other firms in order to match the private, market based, computer industry. This book argues that policy has been a failure when compared with the French policy.

The French have built the most advanced, extensive information technology infrastructure in Europe by planning it around the state owned telephone system and giving a planned lead to the computing industry and equipment suppliers. By contrast, British policy has resulted in a chaotic system which enables the monopolies that use information technology to benefit. But

it creates inefficiency, even for them. The most obvious example of chaos resulting from competition in the computer industries is the inability for users of a computer or software of one type to communicate with others using different standards.

The alternative policy advocated in this book has three main parts : nationalise the main telephone system to ensure investment in a rational, fibre-optics based network; nationalise and invest in Britain's main equipment supplier (which, as a private monopoly, has shown itself unwilling to invest long-term in new technology). And then have the state take the lead in promoting common standards in computing.

The array of information and arguments objectively presented by Costello, Michie and Milne makes a very convincing case for state ownership and planning in this high-tech industry. And they show how a socialist oriented policy on information technology would be integrated with a planned, state-led policy for developing and modernising other key sectors - aerospace, transport, motor vehicles, energy, construction, and pharmaceuticals. In all these sectors either private industry in Britain has failed, or the absence of strong planning has weakened state initiatives.

But overshadowing the whole British economy is the City of London, the international financial centre, which, for a century or more, has passively or actively prevented any long term planning or rational state-led accumulation in British industry. It has contributed to the poor management methods and short term perspectives of British capital.

Under Margaret Thatcher's governments the City of London was freed from any remaining constraints and encouraged to expand as fast as possible. Public opinion among both the middle class and workers is suspicious of the City but its growth has been presented as a healthy expansion of employment in financial services to replace lost jobs in manufacturing.

These financial services are also presented as a valuable and socially necessary support for production, trade and accumulation. In fact, the parasitic, casino side of finance has come to the fore in this period. Thousands of billions of dollars have generated profits through mere speculation.

The question that needs to be faced is how the financial sector can be changed to concentrate on channelling funds into productive investment in a rational economy. Costello, Michie and Milne argue that state ownership of banks and financial houses is the only way to achieve this. They argue that it should be combined with exchange controls to prevent the destabilisation that private speculators can cause on foreign exchange markets.

Beyond The Casino Economy is written as an intervention in current policy debates, not as a theoretical text.

Nevertheless, one of the book's strengths is that it is based on an underlying, well developed Marxist viewpoint. It marks a contribution to Marxist theory by showing (implicitly) how it applies to modern conditions.

For example, they show how the development of information technology has formidable potential. But it is hampered by private property and competition, because the only way big industrial users can make private profits from it is by restricting access. This prevents the potential of integrated information use being gained. This, of course, is a modern example of Marx's law that, at certain times, the relations of production act as a fetter on the productive

forces.

It is hardly necessary to add that this book should be read by every serious socialist trying to overcome the economic problems of today's world. It is especially valuable in countries like South Africa, where the ruling class falsely holds up Thatcher's British capitalism as a success story for privatised industry and free markets. — **Laurence Harris** ★

The green revolutionaries

Water, waste and wildlife

By Eddie Koch, Dave Cooper and Henk Coetzee (Penguin Forum Series, Johannesburg, 1990)

In August 1990, as the Inkatha terror was being launched in the townships of the Transvaal, the issue that captured the imagination of white South Africans was a campaign to save seals from culling. The ANC spent months vainly calling on the government to stop its security forces from provoking a massacre. By contrast, it took a week for the government to respond to the pressure of white South Africans and stop the seal killing.

Green issues have become the trendy campaign of the 1990s. For many of those who are concerned with green questions, the problem begins and ends with rhinos and seals. For the authors of this book, however, the issues are far more complex.

They place the serious ecological problems our country faces firmly in the context of the development of South African colonialism and capitalism. The chapter on wildlife shows how the formation of game reserves and parks was part and parcel of the dispossession of land. Game reserves were largely set up on land expropriated from African people. The first step in establishing game reserves was to forcibly remove people from the land. Today one of the major problems in managing these parks is to keep local people out of them, usually at gunpoint. As a game ranger at the world famous Kruger Park is quoted as saying: "We had poachers in 1982 and 1983 and we killed them off."

Most poachers are not making millions out of the ivory trade or selling rhino horn. They are usually impoverished and unemployed rural people hunting for food on their traditional lands. And they face death or up to 10 years in prison if they are caught. By contrast, in 1990 the Anglo American owned Sappi paper company was fined R800 after contaminating a river and killing over 100 tons of fish.

The chapters on waste and water discuss how the laws controlling pollution are more concerned with accomodating the money-saving and money-making schemes of big business, than the protection of the environment, or the health of workers and the general population. South Africa's pollution laws are amongst the most lenient in the world, and they are hardly enforced at all. As a result the eastern Transvaal is amongst the most polluted regions in the world.

This book shows clearly the link between South African capitalism and the increasing destruction of our environment. However, the record of the socialist countries in

environmental protection is hardly encouraging. The former East Germany has the world's most serious acid rain problem.

Protecting the environment can also have severe effects on employment and on the development of new industry. A NUM shop steward at a mine, which was the target of a green campaign, is quoted as saying:

"None of the environmental organisations have consulted us about the issue and some of our members are wondering if these groups think it is more important to save insects and animals while people have to sacrifice jobs and wages." (p.25)

The authors argue that the costs of destroying the environment cannot be measured using normal economic indicators such as GNP. They say that some qualitative measure of development needs to be used alongside quantitative measures such as GNP. They argue that standards of living are enhanced by creating healthier living conditions and that GNP is an economic measure, not a measure of the quality of life.

At the same time they argue that there is not necessarily a trade-off between being environmentally friendly and industrial development. For example, developing environmentally friendly industry can create new jobs in the recycling industry. And while industry may save money through weak environmental controls, this can create increasing costs for the state in, for example, the need to provide health care to the victims of pollution.

While there may be some truth in this, there are no easy solutions to the problem. Equipment to control the emission of sulphur dioxide, the major cause of acid rain, will cost at least R500 million for each Escom power station - a cost that South Africa can hardly afford. Some ecologists, such as Earthlife representative Chris Albertyn, are quoted as saying that economic growth will have to be compromised in order to protect the environment.

These are problems that a future democratic government will inherit and have to face. The authors argue that: "Democracy and a redistribution of power are necessary but not sufficient conditions for effective ecological protection...(T)here needs to be a fundamental reassessment of the presumption upon which the South African economy is based ... A serious programme to protect and mend the country's ecosystems has also to deal with the economic capacity to provide all citizens with basic social and welfare facilities." (p.57)

While the ANC has released a statement on ecological issues, this is not enough. Protection of the environment is too important an issue to be left just to statements. The book gives some examples of campaigns waged by trade unions, peasant farmers, white farmers and even the Conservative Party around pollution issues. But a lot more still needs to be done to take green issues away from a narrow focus on seals and rhinos, and make them a question of the quality of everyone's lives.

This is one of the weaknesses of this book. It is a good introduction to green issues, but it says very little about how these can be tackled through organisation. Some discussion of the programme and tactics of the various environmental groups would have been a helpful addition. The presentation of statistics is also occasionally confusing, with figures based on differing scientific units sometimes being compared.

However, as an introduction to the enormous environmental issues facing South Africa, this is a very thoughtful and welcome book. — **Mandla Kuzwayo** ★

Skop, skiet and get donnered

THE STICK

Directed by Darrell Roodt, and starring Greg Latter, Sean Taylor, Nicky Rebelo & Frans Dobrowsky.

What is it like to fight for an army that you are forced to be part of? The soldiers of MK are all volunteers, but most members of the SADF are consripts.

"You people are never going to win this fucking war" - these are the last words of this film. They are said by a white conscript to an SADF officer. The conscript did not choose to fight in Angola, where he was forced to see things and commit crimes that the generals deny ever happened. It was not the conscript's war, but his life has been destroyed anyway.

In *The Stick* the SADF is fighting its war against the Angolan people. A patrol is sent to investigate the mysterious disappearance of some soldiers. The patrol is dropped off across "the border" with the task of searching an area. They come across a village, where they observe guerrillas mobilising the people. The next morning, when they attack the village, the guerrillas are gone. Instead, all they find is a witch doctor and the women and children of the village. These they massacre, and for the rest of the film they live and die with the consequences.

The murder of the witch doctor sets off a chain of mystical events in which the patrol's commander and, one by one, the troopies die in strange ways. The supernatural events are symbols for the revenge of the Angolan people. The film seems to be saying that SADF soldiers can never

understand, or be part of, Africa and the African people. The resistance of the local people is mysterious, working in magical ways, which outsiders and oppressors can never understand.

Well, as every MK, FAPLA or PLAN member knows, that is not true. Only military science, based on an understanding of society and not mystical forces can lead to victory in guerrilla warfare. But for the enemy this is, perhaps, how guerrilla victories based on and supported by the people

are experienced. Being defeated by an enemy that seems much more poorly equipped might seem to be mysterious and unexplainable.

The Stick is not a film about guerrilla war. Rather, it is a film about what fighting counter-insurgency war did, and still does, to white conscripts. The guerrillas are only seen fleetingly. We never see anything about their lives or why they are fighting. While this is a limitation, it is not necessarily a weakness of the film.

The power of *The Stick* is that it shows from the inside, from the viewpoint of white South Africa, how nurturing an aggressive militaristic system leads to the moral decay and loss of humanity by the oppressors. In the beginning the soldiers have little more than their uniforms and the colour of their skins in common. As the film progresses and they face their unseen enemy, all traces of morality disappear. They become suspicious and distrustful of each other. Their humanity fades, and they are left with only the will to survive. Some of them don't even have that. As they lose their ability to understand their surroundings and themselves, they become little more than terrified animals.

These themes have been developed before in some of the films about the Vietnam war (films like *Platoon* and *Apocalypse Now*). But the fact that the characters here are recognisable from South African society bring these themes much closer to home.

The Stick does have its faults. The luitenant, for instance, appears to be disturbed from the beginning, but it is never made clear why. The senior officers seem to have more in common with those of the British army than the SADF. At times the editing is confusing.

But these are minor issues. There are very few South African movies that have anything to say about the effects of apartheid on our society. *The Stick* is one of these, and at the same time one of the most powerful. And for this reason alone, it deserves to be seen. —**Mandla Khuzwayo★**

...In their own words

• MASS ACTION

"It could well be asked whether successful negotiation and successful mass action are both possible at the same time" - Dr Gerrit Viljoen.

Viljoen hits the nail on the head. From the *regime's* point of view there can be no successful negotiation with successful mass action. So what lesson do *we* draw from this accurate observation?

A tragic loss

On the evening of February 22, 1991 Jabulani Nxumalo, better known as Comrade Mzala, died in London. His tragic death at the age of 35 has robbed the national liberation and working class movement of a powerful thinker, orator and writer.

'Nobody could doubt Comrade Mzala's fierce commitment to the oppressed and exploited masses of our country'

Mzala was born on October 27, 1955 in Dundee, Northern Natal. His parents Benjamin and Elsie were both teachers. From an early age they inculcated in Mzala a love for books and a disciplined approach to studying. At both primary and secondary schools Mzala's record was outstanding.

After matriculating he studied law at the University of Zululand. At university he was a passionate and fiery fighter against injustice and humbug. His participation in the countrywide upsurge following the Soweto uprising of 1976 made him a marked man. With a number of others he left South Africa to help swell the ranks of the people's army, Umkhonto we Sizwe. He also received training in politics and other specialised subjects in the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic. In all his training courses Mzala excelled.

Mzala rose to important positions in the ranks of Umkhonto we Sizwe, serving in Swaziland and Angola. Yet, whilst absorbed in the work of the underground, Mzala would make time to read books on a wide variety of topics and to engage in heated and controversial debates. In the course of debating, which he loved more than anything, Mzala's mouth would acquire a wry half grin, especially if he did not agree with his opponent's point of view. Once fired by a topic, Mzala would not relent. He would want to pursue the topic to its very end, much to the exasperation of others. Mzala was irrepressible.

He had a voracious intellectual appetite, especially for the Marxist-Leninist classics. One could not see Mzala without him being surrounded by books. In Angola he would sit on the stoep and be completely immersed in the book he was reading.

Mzala was also a prolific writer. The African Communist, Sechaba, Dawn all contain numerous articles by Mzala, published under various pen-names. If one looks at his articles over the years, one can trace his philosophical, ideological and theoretical development.

Over the last few years he wrote the column "Africa Notes" for The African Communist. He is also the author of Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a Double Agenda (Zed Books, 1988).

Much of Mzala's writing focussed on the

national question and the unfolding revolutionary process in our country. On both questions Mzala always endeavoured to inject some original thinking.

Mzala spent a short time in Prague, representing the SACP on the editorial council of the World Marxist Review. In the brief period he was in Prague, he earned the respect of, although he did not always endear himself to, the leaders of many communist parties for his sharp, no-nonsense, polemical style. Unfortunately he took ill and was forced to leave Prague for London.

In London he read for a Ph.D degree at the Open University. His thesis dealt with issues around the national and class question in the South African revolution.

It is a great shame that his untimely death came before he completed his thesis. Hopefully some parts of the thesis can be published.

Comrade Mzala was a loyal member of the ANC and SACP. His biting and at times provocative criticisms did not always please everyone in our movement. But nobody could doubt his fierce commitment to the oppressed and exploited masses of our country.

Mzala was an exceptionally hard worker. He had a wry sense of humour. He could tell jokes and laugh at himself. He was also a devoted family man, and adored his wife Mpho and their two children.

The death of Comrade Mzala has deprived our movement of one of its most brilliant talents. Perhaps the greatest loss of all is to our Party's ongoing attempts to indigenise Marxism-Leninism on South African soil.

Hamba Kahle, Comrade Jabulani "Mzala" Nxumalo! — **Essop Pahad** ★

At a loss for words

Comrade Editor,

I have read cde Phineas Malinga's article on economic policy (*The African Communist*, no 123), and I am at a loss for words. Is this the direction in which our leading communist thinkers are going?

The article makes the following central points:

• It is the failure of state enterprises that lies behind the fashion for privatisation.

• Nationalisation tends to lead to bureaucracy and lack of flexibility. Officials are not accountable; the cost of production is swept under the carpet. With regard to South Africa's gold mines, the ANC doesn't have the capacity - the skilled cadres - to improve on the performance of the present management.

• Labour-intensive production is less efficient. The consumer ends up paying more. Projects must be viable in international competition. Markets for South African exports can be significantly improved.

• Foreign investment should be welcome after liberation. Japanese investors have much to offer, including an egalitarian, up-to-date approach to the organisation of industrial enterprises.

Did we need to buy *The African Communist* to read such arguments? Each of these arguments is repeated day after day in the mainstream newspapers. We buy *The African Communist* in order to gain some class analysis of our situation, and for criticism against the bosses' newspapers.

Since cde Malinga has chosen to give the arguments of the enemy, what are our responses?

• Privatisation is in actual fact the desperate response of the racist state and capital to keep white bureaucrats safe from a democratic government, to raise money because of the state's fiscal crisis, and to allow the big investors like Old Mutual and

Anglo to make a killing by buying parastatals cheaply. In other countries like Britain, privatisation plays the last two roles. Most of these state companies which are privatised were made highly profitable under a relentless state so the capitalists want to buy the shares. This is the opposite of what Malinga says.

• Nationalisation is often much more efficient than private enterprise, even considering the bureaucracy. This was true when Iscor was started in the 1930s (because capital couldn't manage to develop iron and stel on its own). It was also true when the British state took over some industries after World War 2. And it is true today as well, especially considering the gross waste of the conglomerates. At least South Africa's state firms can continue to invest when profits are low. For example, this was the case in the 1970s. In this way they can operate against the destructive law of value. By contrast, as cde Malinga admits, when profits are low the private firms simply move their money into speculation rather than into new machines. And why can't the ANC have disciplined state managers (who also care about workers' conditions)? This is not beyond our movement to develop. And did cde Malinga ever consider the National Union of Mineworkers, which continually calls for nationalisation? Why did the comrade leave this fact out of his article?

• And why does cde Malinga reject the Cosatu and ANC growth through redistribution programme, without even acknowledging it? This programme insists on labour-intensive production and on producing goods needed by the masses of South Africa and the region. If our products must be competitive against the Taiwanese, must we then also have labour repression? Why can't we produce more goods for poor people in South Africa - even if they are not as good quality - and close our doors to cheap imports? Then, as in previous times, our economy will be self-sufficient.

• If we are committed to making basic goods (like houses, furniture, clothing) for people in the country and region, what use are the multinational corporations? They just bring in fancy equipment, make things for wealthy consumers, and take home more profits than are put back into our country. They do more harm than good, because the CIA and other agents of imperialism often accompany them into the Third World. As for Japanese companies, so praised by Malinga, their own Japanese workers are quite badly exploited. And anyway, haven't Japanese companies been in the front-line of sanctions-busting?

There is a need for the comrade to explain why he uses bourgeois arguments, and why he ignores the arguments that are being developed in our unions and political structures. — **Cde Confused, Johannesburg ★**

What type of socialism do South African communists want?

Comrade Editor

Veteran communist Harry Gwala objects to looking at history with the benefit of hindsight (*The African Communist* 123). If mistakes are not to be repeated, let alone crimes in the name of socialism, then hindsight is an invaluable tool. We must analyse the past with the benefit of hindsight so as not to excuse people and events that have harmed the cause of socialism. No matter how understandable the circumstances, wrong is wrong.

In the name of "dialectical and historical materialism" Harry Gwala rejects the role of the individual in history. He describes "an idealistic approach to history" as one "where history is made by individuals and not a collective or the people".

This is wrong. Society is made up of individuals. The two must not be pitted against each other. There have been certain outstanding individuals who have placed their own personal stamp on history. Hitler, Gorbachev, Stalin are such individuals. One of the reasons for the collapse of communist party governments in Eastern Europe was their artificial separation of society and the individual.

Cde Harry Gwala asks "how many faces has socialism as propounded by Marx and Engels?" He immediately answers that, "To us Marx's socialism has only one face, the scientific face."

In the Manifesto of the Communist Party, Marx and Engels devote an entire chapter to different forms of socialism!

They warned us about reactionary peasant socialism. It is this type of socialism that was built up in Romania under Ceaucescu and in Kampuchea under Pol Pot. What type of socialism do South African communists want?

The world in 1991 is a very different place from what it was in 1988. Yet Harry Gwala's article could have been written five or ten years ago. No account is taken of all the changes that have taken place. Yet the article was written in reply to Joe Slovo's pamphlet, "Has Socialism Failed?", which was written precisely in order to take into account our changing world! Today's problems of socialism cannot be solved by basing our programme on the past.

When a democratic non-racial South Africa takes its seat at the United Nations it will not mourn the passing of apartheid. In the same spirit, Communists should not mourn the passing of forms of socialism that have failed.

With the benefit of hindsight we will learn from past mistakes, so that the socialism we build will be a healthier, more valid form of socialism.

Either this is done, or the people of our two countries, South Africa and Australia, will reject a crippled form of socialism, and deservedly so. Bad socialism is as unwanted as capitalism.

I know that after more than forty years of apartheid, communists want the best for the people of South Africa. Nothing less than the best is acceptable.

Yours for peace and socialism — **Simon Steven, Perth, Western Australia ★**

Mistaken identity?

Dear Editor
In the most recent edition of *The African Communist* (no. 123) you review favourably an article jointly written by Rob Lambert and myself on the contemporary labour movement, published in a book edited by William Cobbett and Robin Cohen *(Popular Struggles in South Africa*, James Curry, 1988).

The article was an attempt to understand why and how the democratic union movement was drawn into the wider struggles for national liberation during the 1980s. Let us hope that this positive response from your journal to the work of university-based left scholars, such as Rob Lambert and myself, signals a more constructive relationship between left intellectuals and the Party than that which has often been the case in the recent past.

There is, however, one point of fact that needs correcting. You mention in the review that I laid down my "life for the freedom of South Africa". It would be tempting to joke about this mistake and quote the well-known quip by Mark Twain that "the rumours of my death have been greatly exaggerated". But I do feel the error raises a more serious question that the editorial collective of *The African Communist* ought to reflect on as they relocate back in South Africa after 30 years of exile in London.

Why is it that *The African Communist* can be so out of touch with local personalities that they can confuse me with my late colleague and friend David Webster? The answer for me lies in the failure to take sufficiently seriously the actions and ideas of a new generation of activists and left scholars that emerged inside South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s. Instead of engaging with these individuals in open debate, *The African Communist* has often responded in a sectarian and dogmatic way by labelling these positions as "workerism", "legal Marxism", "social democracy", "economism", and "reformism", lumping together different individuals whose work and politics often differed.

At the time of his assassination on 1 May 1989 David Webster was a senior lecturer in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand. He was a respected anthropologist who had been drawn into the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1980s, initially to defend detained students such as Barbara Hogan. He was to become a driving force in the establishment of the Detainee Parents Committee and, later, the Five Freedoms Forum. In the last years of his life he became a widely respected and influential "academic-activist".

My own work is rather more modest and is confined largely to the seminar rooms of the University of the Witwatersrand. However I have a long standing commitment to the democratic labour movement and do help from time to time in educational work with the trade unions. Although David and I were always good friends and comrades, we held quite distinct intellectual and political projects.

I trust that this letter corrects this mistake and contributes to a closer relationship between the university intelligentsia and your journal. I wish *The African Communist* well in this new phase of its history and look forward to reading it in future. — **Eddie Webster ★**

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